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"I BEG YOUR PARDON," SAID BERYL, BLUSHING CRIMSON, "I FORGOT THAT IT IS RUDE TO LOOK AT PEOPLE!"

BERYL'S TEMPTATION.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was a small country town of that awkward and unhappy size where the inhabitants are too many for everyone to know everyone else, in the simple style of a big family, and there are not enough people for the separate sets to go their own way comfortably without interfering with each other.

Ashbury was a very pretty place, only one hour by rail from London, and a most charming mixture of rural scenery and town advantages, as the estate agents always put in their advertisements of any property they had to dispose of; but they quite forgot to add that for spitefulness and petty narrowmindedness Ashbury would certainly have taken the palm over most places of its size, that the little town was a veritable hot-bed of gossip, while envy, hatred and malice flourished apace in such congenial soil.

In a small house in one of the least pretentious streets of Ashbury, the blinds were raised one November morning after having been lowered in unbroken gloom for six long days. The afternoon before the master of the mean abode had been laid in his last home, and now his family needed to tear themselves from their sorrows and face the problem of how they were to exist without their bread winner.

The Rev. Laurence Chesney had been a good man. Even in spiteful, fault-finding Ashbury, people admitted that; those who had differed widest indeed from the dead minister and never entered his chapel, yet felt conscious that he wore the white flower of a blameless life, while his unexpected death made those of the "congregation" who had wearied of his gentle rule and longed for a little more fire and thunder in their chosen teacher, feel thankful they had not succeeded in obtaining the dismissal of the old minister in favour of some younger and more energetic man.

"Mr. Chesney was a gentleman," said Mrs. Hodson, the leading lady of Little Bethel, to her son and heir, who had been brought up to no profession and lived at home; "but he was sadly

wanting in worldly wisdom. I don't suppose he has made any provision for his family."

"Well, mother," said Algernon, languidly, "I don't see how he could save much. We weren't too liberal to him, and children came apace to that little house in the New-road. I wonder what Mrs. Chesney will do now?"

Mother and son glanced at each other, they were so rich that they could have started the minister's widow in some flourishing business without feeling the loss, and they both dearly loved patronage, but the meaning look they exchanged did not refer to this.

"It's very hard with all my money I can't please myself," growled Algy. "You can't find any fault with Beryl, mother, except that she is poor."

"I find no fault with Beryl," answered Mrs. Hodson; "while her father was alive I should have objected to the connection, because everyone was getting tired of him, and if you had married his daughter he would have expected you to take his side at the next meeting of the chapel members. It is different now."

"Beryl is pretty enough and elegant enough to

do us credit. Mother, don't you think you would like her for a daughter?"

The deceased Hodson had been a chiseler of much prudence. He left his enormous fortune divided equally between his wife and son, but so tied up that his widow lost everything if she took a second husband, and Algy forfeited his share if he married before the age of thirty without his mother's consent. He was an easy-going, rather priggish young man, with a great sense of his own importance; but, so far as it was in him to love anyone but himself, he loved Beryl Chesney, the dead minister's eldest child.

"I suppose I must give way," said Mrs. Hodson, rather grudgingly, "but, Algy, you must persuade Mrs. Chesney to leave the neighbourhood. Advise her to start a lodging-house in London; in our position it would never do for your wife to have a crowd of poor relations in the town."

Algy nodded approvingly, and very soon after breakfast he put on his hat and coat, and strolled gently down the town till he came to the New-road, which ran from the bottom of the winding High-street to the railway station.

"Is Miss Chesney in?"

The very small maid, who was washing the steps of No. 45 (houses only boasting very small servants somehow mostly have their steps cleaned at all sorts of unusual times), thought so, and in a minute or two Algernon Hodson stood in the little front parlour.

It was easy to see the room was not lived in. It had the prim tidiness, the close confined atmosphere of an apartment rarely used. The gaily-bound books on the shiny round table, the extremely bright carpet and slippery horsehair chairs, made Algernon shudder; he had—be thought—a very refined taste, and these things jarred on it.

There came in while he still felt the jar, the object of his visit. A slight, fragile-looking girl, with a wealth of nut-brown hair, and lovely violet eyes. A girl who would have been more suited to a mansion than to that humble home, but who yet had never uttered a complaint, or seemed to think fate had used her harshly as to worldly prospects.

Her face was pale now from weeping, her beautiful eyes were heavy with unshed tears, for she had been her father's darling, and sorrowed for him bitterly; but it was a sweet face still, despite its mourning, and Algernon Hodson felt as he took her little fingers in his, that even if his mother had not relented it would have been a real effort for him to give up Beryl.

"We have been so sorry for you," he assured her, kindly, "Mr. Chesney was ill so short a time, that the blow must have been quite unexpected."

"I don't think it came as a surprise to him," answered the girl softly. "Mr. Hodson, forgive me, please, but I can't talk of it yet."

"No wonder," said Algy, approvingly, he liked her manner so much, "but I have come here to-day on a very different subject; has Mrs. Chesney been able to form any plans for the future?"

"She hopes to open a little school; my father was so much respected here, and she thinks she would be sure to obtain pupils."

Algy shook his head.

"Ashbury is overdone with schools; my mother suggested Mrs. Chesney would do well to go to London, there is so much more scope there, she might take a good-sized house, and make quite a nice little income by letting lodgings."

Beryl flushed crimson.

"I will tell mother what you say, but—I I would much rather stay here."

"I hope you will stay here," he answered, earnestly; "it is the great desire of my heart that you should not leave Ashbury; that is why I came to-day."

No restage of his meaning came to Beryl.

When her father was "called" to Ashbury a dozen years before, Algy was a schoolboy in his teens, chiefly remarkable as being too quiet for mischief, and wearing gloves on all occasions; Beryl, then a small girl of nine or ten, had privately voted him a coward.

Mr. Hodson was alive in those days, and the leading deacon at Little Bethel. Beryl could remember solemn tea parties at the Mount, when

Algy was directed by his parents to entertain her, and she had thought him hopelessly dull and stupid.

Of late years they had met more rarely, and certainly the minister's daughter had never thought of Algy in the light of a lover.

"It is kind of you to say that," she answered gently, "of course it would be painful to go away and live among strangers, but we may be forced to take that step."

"You need never leave Ashbury," replied Algy; "Miss Chesney, I have my mother's consent to ask you to be my wife. I am quite sure that you would make a most charming helpmate, and that with a little training—you would soon get used to your new position."

An impulse seized Beryl to throw something at Algy's head during this patronizing speech, but she managed to resist it.

She was a proud, high-spirited girl, and every word he had just said seemed to her an insult, but prudence kept her from any outburst, and she answered gravely,—

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Hodson, but I must decline the honour."

"Oh, nonsense," said Algy quickly; "you can't be in earnest. You and I have always been fond of each other, Beryl, and I've a thousand a year besides what must come to me when the old lady goes off. I dare say we'd manage to lend a helping hand to your mother and the children: for their sakes you'd better think over it a little before you send me away."

"I could not marry you for their sakes," said Beryl, quietly, "it would not be fair to you, I can only repeat that I am very much obliged to you, but I unhesitatingly decline your offer."

He was a tall, fair-haired man, who, somehow, had just missed being good-looking. He was too tall for an ordinary room, and had an awkward stoop; his hair had more than a suspicion of red in its colouring, his eyes were weak, and his skin boasted a liberal display of freckles.

Mrs. Hodson always said of her son, "he was not handsome, but so distinguished-looking." The first part of the sentence was strictly true, the latter could only be explained by a mother's partiality.

He looked at Beryl as though, even now, he could not believe in her rejection.

"Are you afraid of the old lady?" he asked, rather sheepishly, "I'd see she didn't worry you, and I can assure you, too, you are a great favourite of hers."

"Mr. Hodson," said Beryl, wishing heartily the interview was over, "you have forgotten one item; you may not believe in love, but I do; I shall never marry anyone unless I care for them with all my heart and soul."

"Then why not care for me so?"

"I couldn't," she said, frankly.

"Just think a moment," said Algy, "of all you are throwing away;" he paused to tick off the advantages on his fingers; "one of the best houses in Ashbury; enough money to cut a dash; my mother's companionship, she comes of a first rate family, and can hold her own with any lady in the land; and, last of all—me!"

"I know," and Beryl's voice had a weary ring. "I quite appreciate the honour you have done me, Mr. Hodson, but indeed I cannot give you any different answer, I wish I could!"

"I won't take your answer now," he persisted.

"Look here, Beryl, this is Tuesday, I'll give you a week to think it over. I'm sure you'll see things different then; and now I'll be off. Remember I hold to all I've said. You shall be Mrs. Algernon in less than a month, and I'll be ready to help your mother with a bank note when she wants one!"

He tumbled over the little servant—her cleaning had got as far as the passage now—and went out, swinging the gate noisily behind him.

Beryl Chesney flung herself back in a low chair. She never heeded that there was no fire in the grate, and she was already bitterly cold. Her mind was too full of trouble to have room for any physical discomfort. She had never liked Algernon Hodson less than she had done this morning. Nothing in the world would induce her to marry him, and yet she knew perfectly well that if her mother once heard of his wooing,

a terrible pressure would be put upon her to accept him.

Her eyes were closed, poor girl, as she tried to take in the new complication which had come into her life. She did not see the folding-doors which divided the best parlour from the family sitting-room noiselessly open, and Mrs. Chesney's head, in a very new widow's cap, obtrude itself, to see whether the visitor had departed.

The coast being clear, the head was followed by the rest of the widow's person, and in another moment Beryl's hand was seized in a soft warm pressure, and her mother's voice cried ecstatically,—

"Oh, my dear! I am so delighted. It is better news than I ever dreamed of. I always knew dear Algy admired you, but he is quite in his mother's power, and I feared she would insist on his marrying money; but he expressly said he had her consent to propose to you, so all will be well!"

Gently but firmly Beryl extricated her hand; she sat bolt upright on her chair, feeling the struggle had begun, and then she said gently,—

"If you heard what Mr. Hodson wished, mamma, you must have heard my answer. I told him it was impossible I could marry him!"

"You needn't speak like that, as though I was to blame because the walls are thin," said Mrs. Chesney, who, like most eavesdroppers, was most tenacious of declaring her eavesdropping was involuntary. "Anyone in the dining-room must hear what goes on in this room."

"I know," said Beryl; "and of course I should have told you. I thought you had gone out."

"I was just getting ready, when I saw Mr. Algernon from the window, and then I came down, thinking he would ask for me. He and his mother are the leading members of the congregation, you know. I hoped they might have got up some little collection, just as a trifling mark of respect to your dear father's memory. I am sure we need some money badly enough!"

"Mr. Hodson did not mention anything of the kind."

"Of course not, it would be quite out of place now. The bride of the richest man in Ashbury couldn't take charity. I think I shall go to London after all, Beryl; money goes further there. I can leave Nelly with you and Mr. Algernon; she needs country air, but the others will thrive in London; and, my dear child, I'd rather have a fixed allowance than a bank note now and again; it would be more dependable!"

She was trying by taking her daughter's consent for granted, and utterly ignoring the rejection she must have overheard, to coerce Beryl into yielding to her wishes. The girl had been a dutiful daughter hitherto, sacrificing herself in many ways for the younger children. It did not occur to Mrs. Chesney that Beryl would ever revolt against her authority.

The girl rose slowly from her chair; she stood holding on to the small table for support, so weak and tottering did she feel; but she met Mrs. Chesney's eyes unflinchingly, and her voice was firm and decided.

"I am very sorry to disappoint you, mamma, but I cannot marry Algernon Hodson!"

"Why not say you will not, it would be truer," said the mother indignantly.

"Then I will not marry him," replied Beryl unflinchingly. "I would sacrifice a great deal for you and the children, mamma; but even for your sakes I cannot marry a man whom I despise!"

"Mr. Hodson has a thousand a year. I can't think what more you want," said Mrs. Chesney in an aggrieved tone; "but it's no use giving yourself the airs of a tragedy queen, Beryl; your duty is to obey me, and I tell you to marry Mr. Algernon, and think yourself lucky for the chance."

"I cannot do it, mamma!"

One of the children, a sickly girl of five or six, crept in then, and tried to hide her head in its usual resting place, Beryl's dress, but her mother detached her with no gentle hand.

"Be off, Nelly," she said sharply; "I want to talk to sister, and I can't be bothered by you children;" and the little girl with a frightened face obeyed her.

"We had better go into the other room," said Mrs. Chesney, when the small intruder was disposed of. "I'm perished, and your face is pretty well blue with the cold. I've two or three things to say to you, and we may as well be warm!"

Beryl followed her in perfect silence. Mrs. Chesney gave the girl the place nearest the fire, and even stirred it into a blaze to warm the numbed fingers. She had no wish to be unkind, only she could not let such a golden chance as Algernon's offer pass by.

"You are two and twenty turned," she resumed, when this was accomplished, "and you can't say I haven't been a good mother to you and done my best for you. If you'll consent to marry Algernon Hodson I'll not say anything of the past; but if not, there's a long story I mean to tell you."

"I cannot promise, mamma, and I don't understand. What is there about the past I do not know?"

"A good deal," said Mrs. Chesney, bluntly, "and something you'd be a deal happier if you didn't force me into telling you."

But Beryl said nothing. Her beautiful eyes were bent on the ground, and she seemed lost in thought, which irritated her mother.

"When I first married Laurence Chesney he'd a nice little house at Hackney," said Mrs. Chesney, "and as we'd no children there was more room than we wanted, and knowing our expenses would increase by and by, I told my husband he'd better let the parlours to a lodger. We hadn't had a card in the window many days when a lady called. She didn't ask many questions, and she seemed satisfied with all I told her, for she took the rooms there and then at my own terms, and the next day she and her baby came to live with us. She was a pretty young creature as ever I'd wish to see, and some of her clothes were fit for a princess; but there was a secret in her life, Beryl, and where there's secrecy there's generally worry. I don't want to speak bitterly of the dead. Mrs. Randal lived with us over a year, and she paid us regularly, though I noticed most of her pretty things disappeared as the months wore on, and I don't doubt she turned them into money. One day she asked me to mind the baby for an hour or two, as she was obliged to go out on business. I'd had the same thing asked before, and I never made any difficulty. I knew pretty well she was going out to turn something into money, and I wondered rather in my own mind what she'd do when she'd nothing left to sell. I needn't have wondered, Beryl, for she never came back at all."

Beryl had listened with breathless interest. She would not ask what was her own connection with the story, for an awful fear at her heart was whispering the truth already; but as Mrs. Chesney paused she asked, anxiously,—

"Did she die?"

"My dear, I can't tell you. My husband and I couldn't make up our minds about it twenty years ago, and it isn't easier to say now. She was very delicate. She had half starved herself, poor creature, though her child was always well fed. She may have turned giddy, fallen down, and been run over, or she may have deserted her child because it was a burden and an expense. Laurence always would have it that she died. Anyway, she seemed too fond of the baby to leave it willingly, I must say that."

Beryl looked at her imploringly.

"I'd lost my own child not long before, and I couldn't bear the thought of sending this baby girl—she was but two years old—to the work-house. I told Laurence the relations would surely send in time, and meanwhile there were clothes and things of Mrs. Randal's still left that would fetch a good bit of money. My husband warned me help might not come, and that if we adopted the child then we could not abandon her later; but my heart was set on it, and he yielded. And now you see, Beryl, there is another reason you should accept Algernon Hodson. You are not even our own child. You are just a waif and stray brought up on charity. I won't say you owe me any gratitude for what I've done for you these twenty years. I won't say you ought to be pleased to be able to help me now; but I say for your own sake marry Mr. Hodson. Your

story may come out, and then it's not every man who would marry a waif who had not even a name of her own."

A long, long silence, then Beryl went up to Mrs. Chesney's side and kissed her.

"You have been very, very kind to me," the girl said, brokenly, "and if only I could repay you some other way I'd do it, oh, so gladly! but I couldn't marry Mr. Hodson. Why, if he and his mother found out my story they would be ready to kill me!"

"They never need find it out," said Mrs. Chesney. "We left Hackney before you were five years old. We had very few friends there. I don't suppose the few we had would remember Mrs. Randal and our adopting her child."

"Won't you tell me something about her?"

"There's not much to tell. She was like you, only prettier. She was quite young—not past twenty, I should say—and she was very unhappy. Her hands and feet were very small, and it was easy to see she'd never been used to wait on herself. She wrote a good many letters; but all the time she was with us—over a year—she never once received one. I don't think she had any friends in Hackney; she never seemed to visit anyone. Her Christian name was Beryl. She told me once it had been her mother's name, and that her mother was dead. I can't tell you any more. We sold most of the things she left; we had to for the sake of money; but we kept whatever my husband thought might aid in identifying you. I'll fetch the box he put them in. It hasn't been opened since we left Hackney."

She brought a small wooden box, painted yellow, the kind servants generally use to hold their clothes. Beryl remembered well how as a little child she had often asked what was inside and why it was never opened.

Since they came to Ashbury the box had been stowed away; at least, she never remembered seeing it.

Mrs. Chesney unlocked it, and then signed to Beryl to take out the things, which the girl did reverently, one by one—a strange collection; but one which threw no light upon Mrs. Randal's history. First, a half-hoop ring of pearls, with the two names, Gerald and Beryl, inscribed on the inside; then a bundle of letters tied with blue ribbon.

"They tell you nothing," interposed Mrs. Chesney, "except that your mother was at school in Paris. They are all signed Gerald, and dated from some Froulé boarding-house."

Beryl went on with her survey. The portrait of a young man in full regimentals enclosed in a leather case, two or three books with the name "Beryl" and various dates, a few articles of dress, not valuable enough to be sold, and yet too remarkable to have been worn by Mrs. Chesney or her children, and there the collection ended; and as Mrs. Chesney had remarked, nothing in it gave a clue to Mrs. Randal's story.

"She must be dead," said the girl, brokenly. "Oh, mamma," forgetting she had no right to call the widow by that old familiar name, "you don't think she went away on purpose, meaning to desert me?"

"I hope not," said Mrs. Chesney, gravely; "but you must remember, Beryl, she was very young, little more than a child. For a year she had lived utterly alone in cheap lodgings, without one familiar voice; she must have known she could not go on long living on the sale of her few belongings. If she had offended her father, and he released and offered to take her back provided she came alone we can't wonder much at her accepting his terms."

"But you say she loved me?"

"She loved you dearly. It may be, some honest man offered to marry her, but would not adopt an alien child."

"You think then my father was dead?"

Mrs. Chesney shook her head. "I can't say. I don't think Mrs. Randal was a widow. She never wore black. Beryl, child, be sensible, don't let your brain be lost wool-gathering over the past; but just let that past be a warning to you not to quarrel with your good fortune. Algernon Hodson may not be very good-looking; but you must remember this, he must

be very much in love with you for both he and his mother think a great deal of money."

"Yes," admitted Beryl, grudgingly, "he must be disinterested."

"And, remember, he need never know what I have told you. I'll keep your secret, Beryl. I've loved you so long as one of my own, it'll only be natural to go on treating you as a daughter."

"But you know if Algernon and his mother had an idea of this they would scorn me, as beneath their notice."

"May be; but they won't know."

"If I loved Algernon," said Beryl, dreamily, "I think I would do anything in the world rather than he should know; but now I don't care."

"For goodness sake Beryl, have some thought for me," said Mrs. Chesney, sharply. "I have got to get my bread and my children's. The Hodsons are the most important people in the congregation. It'll be bad enough for me if you refuse Algernon at all; but if you tell him the story of your parentage they'll be furious. They'll blame me and my poor husband for bringing you here under false pretences, and exposing Algernon to the fascinations of a nameless waif. It'll be bad enough in any case for me; but if you tell him your true history it'll be ten times worse."

"I won't tell him, mother," said Beryl, solemnly, "I promise you."

"And won't you marry Algernon? Oh, my dear, do think better of it! What is to become of us? We can't stay here after offending the Hodsons."

"You and the children can stay. If I go away Mrs. Hodson can't blame you for my misdeeds."

"But what can you do?" asked Mrs. Chesney, who was not a bad-hearted woman, on the whole. "You haven't had education enough for a governess, and you're not fit for hard work. Well, Mr. Algernon is not coming for your answer till next week, so you have time to think better of it."

And that was Beryl's temptation: on the one hand, a splendid home and ample means, the power to lend a helping hand to her foster mother and the children, and unlimited opportunities of doing good. She knew perfectly that Algernon loved her so well that she could easily obtain great influence over him.

With Mrs. Hodson she had always been a favourite. One word, and she would be the providing spirit at the Mount.

Algernon was pretentious and self-seeking; but when once she was his wife he would regard her dignity as part of his own, and uphold it accordingly.

One little word, and that dark story of the past could be laid to rest for ever.

Young Mrs. Hodson would be known as the late minister's eldest child, and the story of the beautiful, lonely lodger, who supported herself by selling her clothes and jewels piecemeal need never be mentioned.

As the mistress of the Mount, Beryl would not need to wonder whether Mrs. Randal was wife or widow, whether an accident cut her off suddenly in the flower of her youth, or whether she was living now in luxury and had deserted her child of *malice prepense*.

This was the temptation which came to Beryl. One little word, and her pecuniary troubles were over; but, then, that word was a lie. How could she vow to love and honour Algernon Hodson when her only feeling for him was contemptuous indifference?

CHAPTER II.

A THICK fog hung over London like a heavy veil. Even those most familiar with the busy streets could hardly thread their way. Traffic was well-nigh suspended, most of the omnibuses had ceased to run, cabs were demanding fancy prices and getting them, too; at King's Cross station day seemed to have turned into night owing to the quantity of gas it was necessary to use, and it was with an air of terror that a slight, girlish figure, dressed in deep mourning, stepped out of a third-class carriage on to the platform.

Beryl's choice had been made and her temptation resisted. She would not marry Algernon Hodson for the sake of his money, and fearing

her refusal would be visited by Algy and his mother on Mrs. Chesney, Beryl had not even told her foster mother of her decision. She had packed a small bag while the widow attended a meeting of the chapel managers convened for the purpose of "considering her case," and long before poor Mrs. Chesney had escaped from the shower of good advice offered her liberally by people who begrudged her anything else, Beryl had left the shabby little house in the New-road and entered the London train.

At Ashbury it was a dull day, certainly "a grey day," Beryl termed it, but there was nothing in the weather to suggest to the girl the state of things she would find in London.

Poor Beryl, when she saw the fog-bound terminus, she was almost terrified, and in her fright she did, perhaps, the wisest thing that could have been thought of. She seated herself on one of the benches just beyond the book-stall, and tried to think out her future.

Poor girl, she knew very little of London. Short as was the journey from Ashbury the minister's income had not often permitted his family the luxury of a day in town; but Beryl had one friend in the great metropolis whom she believed she might trust in now.

Mrs. Keith Gordon had come to Ashbury two or three years before to spend the summer months. She had met Beryl by accident, and being an artist she was struck by the sweet face and girlish grace. Having that peculiar lack of ceremony common to her profession, she had called on Mr. Chesney and asked his permission to paint his daughter as the subject of a new picture she was contemplating, to be called "Maidenhood." The offer was declined, civilly—for the Rev. Laurence could not be discourteous—but firmly. He told Mrs. Gordon he did not want Beryl to become vain, and that beauty was but skin deep. The lady might have been expected to take offence, but she did nothing of the kind. She admired the true independent spirit, and though she never said another word about the picture she made the little Chesneys free of her fruit and flowers and her lovely garden. But Beryl was her favourite, and when she left Ashbury she told the girl they would surely meet again some day.

"I will give you my address, dear, and one of these days when you are in London, you must come and see me; you remind me of a dear friend long since dead, and for her sake I can never forget you."

Not a very strong prop on which to lean, but Beryl knew that Mrs. Gordon would be even better than her word. It was not charity or patronage the poor girl wanted, but just a few kind words of welcome, womanly advice as to what work she could undertake, that would keep her honestly, and perhaps a shelter till she could find it.

There was just one thing more which made Beryl turn to Rosamond Gordon in her hour of sorrow. Could the friend of whom she reminded the artist have possibly been her own mother? If she told Mrs. Gordon the story she had heard so lately, would she hear anything more of Mrs. Randall than her foster-mother had told her?

The address given by her one friend seemed burnt into Beryl's brain.

"Ivy Lodge, Fulham."

She knew also that some white omnibuses passed within a few minutes' walk of the house, but the fog had disconcerted all her plans, she could not possibly walk even to the omnibus. She had given one anxious glance outside the station which only convinced her she could not find her way a hundred yards; a cab would have solved the difficulty, but Beryl had heard one driver ask an old gentleman five shillings to take him to Charing Cross, which was not a third of the distance to Fulham, and the money in her little purse was so small a sum, and she dared not risk such an expense.

She left her place on the form, and once more went outside the station to see if the weather had improved, but, if anything, the fog was denser still, and poor Beryl was at her wits' end.

Something in the girl's beautiful face or in her deep mourning dress, aroused the compassion of one of the bystanders,

Although Hector Emsley was not wont to trouble himself about women, being a professed disbeliever in the sex, the girl's patient despair, and something wistful in the fair face, lit up by the large gas lamp under which she was standing, aroused his pity, and after a moment's hesitation he said, gravely,

"Can I be of any use to you? You seem to have been waiting here some time, have you lost your way?"

Beryl accepted the kindness as simply as it was proffered, she did not even trouble to see if the speaker were old or young. She felt his voice was one to be trusted.

"I want to go to Fulham," she said quietly. "I was told to take a white omnibus, but there are none here, and I feel afraid of losing myself if I go to look for one."

"You are not used to London, probably?"

"I have been to London two or three times, but it is five years since I was here last. I do not know many parts."

"Very few omnibuses are running now on account of the fog, it would be better to take a cab."

"I would rather go in the omnibus," said Beryl, hoping he would not ask why. But Hector could read between the lines, and was far too discreet to ask that question.

"I am going to Fulham," he remarked, as though it was the most natural thing in the world, "but I mean to take the underground railway; if you will trust to my escort, I shall be happy to take your ticket and see you safely into the train. The station is only a stone's throw, and we can easily reach it."

"I should be so much obliged if you do not mind the trouble. I was afraid I should never get to Fulham."

"It's no trouble at all. You'll be a good while in the train, and very likely have to change; but I'm sure you'll be safer than trying to find your way about London such a day as this."

He took possession of her bag, offered her his arm, and had piloted her safely across the road before she knew what he intended. A few more cautious steps and they were safe in the Metropolitan booking office.

"Which part of Fulham do you want?" Hector inquired before he took the tickets. "There are three stations, Walham-green, Parson's-green, and Putney-bridge which are all more or less Fulham."

"I don't know. I am going to a house called Ivy Lodge. I think it must be at the end of Fulham, for its garden slopes down to the Thames."

She never noticed Hector's start. She was too busy trying to find her purse to pay for her ticket.

"Wait till we are in the train," he said, pleasantly.

Fortune favoured them for a train came in almost as soon as they reached the platform. Hector handed Beryl into a first-class compartment where no one invaded their solitude.

As they were borne swiftly out of the station for the first time she had time to look at her companion and wonder what manner of man was her friend in need. The survey satisfied her. She saw a tall, broad-shouldered man, who looked almost military in his erect bearing, and trim well-knit figure. What a contrast to poor Algernon and his stoop. Beryl's new acquaintance had dark curly hair, a thick moustache and a short well-kempt beard, perhaps the last item misled her and made her think him at the least forty. In reality he was still under thirty.

"Well!" he inquired with an amused smile, as he noticed her inspection. "Are you satisfied that I am at least not Red Riding Hood's wolf but plain flesh and blood?"

"I beg your pardon," Beryl blushed crimson.

"I forgot that it is rude to look at people."

"Then I was rude enough this morning, for I looked at you two or three times before I spoke to you. You've no idea how piteous and woe-begone you looked. I expected every minute you would begin to cry."

"I am not given to crying—for trifles."

"And you can call a London fog a trifle?"

"Yes—compared to graver things."

He looked at the black crêpe trimmed dress, and understood the allusion.

"Forgive me," said Emsley, quietly. "I had forgotten—I'm a dreadful bear, my sister always tells me so."

"Have you a sister?" asked Beryl, wistfully. "I have none. I used to have six till a week ago."

Mr. Emsley stared.

"You don't mean they all died in a single week. It sounds too terrible to be true."

"They are all alive. It is only they are not my sisters any more."

Mr. Emsley felt perplexed, but asked no questions, he seemed to understand she had spoken absently without meaning to take him into her confidence.

"Well, I have only one sister," he rejoined, cheerfully, "and though I am not often curious, I have been wondering ever since you told me you were going to Ivy Lodge, Fulham, why in the world Rosamond never told me she was expecting you."

Beryl looked up in surprise.

"Rosamond is Mrs. Gordon's name. I have seen it in her books. You don't surely mean that you are her brother?"

"Her only brother. You can ask her if you doubt me, but I don't think she'll deny the relationship."

"How very strange?"

"Not at all," said Emsley. "Most people have at least one brother. I don't see why Rosamond should be denied such a relation."

"I meant how strange that I should meet you."

"I've a particularly bad memory," confessed Hector, "especially for faces; but I think I should have remembered meeting you if I had ever seen you at Ivy Lodge."

"I have never been there in my life!"

"I dined there last night, but Rosamond never mentioned she was expecting you."

He regretted this remark the next minute, for the girl's fair face blushed crimson.

"Mrs. Gordon does not expect me. I have not the least right in the world to worry her with my difficulties, but she was at Ashbury two years ago, and when she went away she told me if I was ever in any trouble to come to her and she would help me."

"You've done quite right to take her at her word," said Hector gravely. "I'm her brother, but I must say this for Rose, she is as true as steel!"

"Is she well?"

"Uncommonly, and as happy as a sandboy. The world, I take it, is divided into two classes, the people who make martyrs of themselves and the people who don't; my sister belongs to the latter class!"

"She used to seem to me the happiest person I ever knew; it puzzled me because—she was a widow."

"Ah! Perhaps you think widows ought to go about like Niobe; but in this case Rosamond has some excuse, the late Keith Gordon was an unutterable scoundrel—and his wife knew it."

"How terrible for her!"

"Pretty bad! But my honourable brother-in-law has been dead these five years, and so Rosamond has well-nigh recovered from all she suffered."

"She paints beautifully!"

"Pretty well. She took to it first to drown care, and goes on with it now to fill up her life. As you go through the world you'll notice it's not the happy women who plunge suddenly into some profession, art is taken up nine cases out of ten to fill the mind of a miserable creature, and give her no room in her thoughts for her sorrow."

They alighted at Putney Bridge, and walked in perfect silence down two or three roads of almost painfully new houses, then when they reached the turning which led down to the river Mr. Emsley paused.

"You can't mistake the house, it has 'Ivy Lodge' written on the gate. I won't come in now, I am sure you and my sister will have a great deal to say to each other."

They had parted before Beryl recollected she had never thanked him for his kindness.

Another moment, and she was knocking at the door of Ivy Lodge, and asking for its mistress.

By this time it was not far from three o'clock. The parlour-maid threw open the drawing-room door, and the artist, who sat in a low chair by the fire, started up at the sight of her visitor.

"Beryl! is it possible?"

The room was sweet with the perfume of violets; it had the air of being lived in by a refined, sensitive woman, who loved to surround herself by pleasant things.

Beryl felt dreamily, it was quite different from any room she had ever seen before, and then her hostess had seated her in a soft lounging chair, and began with her own fingers to unfasten her wraps.

Mrs. Gordon was a dozen years older than her brother, and the troubles he had hinted at had left their marks on her face. She was handsome still, but there were lines on her face not, of time's causing, lines written there surely by the finger of sorrow.

"My dear child, I am so pleased to see you, you must stay with me as long as ever you can; but," as she suddenly became aware of the deep mourning, "What does this mean? you have lost someone, not your father, I hope?"

Beryl bent her head. Rosamond Gordon held the girl a little closer to her heart; she had seen enough of the minister to know what a blow it must have been.

"And you have come to me. I am very glad to have you, dear; but does Mrs. Chesney consent to spare you?"

"She would have kept me if she could," said Beryl frankly; "but, Mrs. Gordon, she is left with nothing to live on, and she hopes the chapel managers will help her for father's sake; but I—I had offended the two leading ones; oh, dreadfully, and so I had to come away."

"I think I understand," said Mrs. Gordon, cheerfully: "young Mr. Hodson and his mother are both managers, aren't they?"

"Yes—but—"

"And I saw, when I was at Ashbury, what that young man wanted, and hoped he would not have his way."

"Are you a magician, Mrs. Gordon?"

"No, child; but I have my eyes open. Do you know it would never have surprised me to receive your wedding-cards. I knew what he wished, and I feared the home influence would be too strong for you."

Beryl shook her head.

"Please never let us speak of it again. Mrs. Gordon, I want you to tell me how to earn my living. I should like to be in London. I want to keep myself, and to find out something. I have set myself a solemn task, and I don't mind what sacrifice I make, so that I achieve it."

Mrs. Gordon stooped and kissed her.

"I will help you all I can; but, my dear, trust me—what is the task you have so much at heart?"

"I want to find my mother."

"Your mother? Surely, she is at Ashbury, with the children!" said the artist, much perplexed, and wondering whatever trouble had turned the poor girl's brain.

"Mrs. Chesney is not my mother;" and Beryl sobbed out her story, never doubting of her friend's sympathy.

"I seem to feel I can't rest until I know the truth," concluded the poor girl, brokenly. "Surely, it can't be that my mother deserted me. She can't have gone off to live in ease and luxury, not caring if her baby were sent to the workhouse. I don't care about finding relations to own me: I would thankfully work for my living all my days; but I would give years of my life just to know two things—first, that death, and not desertion, robbed me of my mother; and that she was—my father's wife."

Mrs. Gordon put one hand tenderly on the girl's bowed head.

"Was her name Beryl, like yours?"

"Yes; and Mrs. Chesney says she was like me, only prettier."

"I doubt the 'prettier,'" said the artist, kindly. "My child, I can tell you something of the past—not much, and nothing that can give a clue to either of the things you want to know

—only when I was a girl I had a dear friend and schoolfellow called Beryl, and—I think she must have been your mother."

"My mother was at school in France. I have some letters of my father's written to her there. His name was Gerald."

Mrs. Gordon shook her head.

"I will tell you all I can, but I fear it will not help you. I am forty-one now, and Beryl Maitland was just one year my junior. We were at school together in Paris, and close friends, though our positions were widely different. I was the eldest of a large family, and destined to earn my bread as a teacher. Beryl was an heiress."

The other Beryl started.

"An heiress! and she had to sell her clothes for food!—it seems impossible."

"It is true, she was an orphan, but her uncle was enormously rich. He had made a large fortune in India, besides what he had to start with. He troubled himself very little about Beryl. He placed her with Mrs. Harfort (the principal of our school) when she was seven years old, with instructions she was to have every advantage money could buy. Mrs. Harfort was devoted to her, and spent her uncle's money judiciously. My recollections of Beryl are that she had everything heart could wish for—except a home. She never left the school, even for a day. It was her uncle's wish she should not return to England till she was seventeen, when he meant to instal her as mistress of his establishment. One month before her seventeenth birthday Beryl was missing. That she eloped and left Paris with a lover was clearly proved; but who that lover was, or how she became acquainted with him, no one had the faintest idea."

"And her uncle—what was his name?"

"I cannot tell you. I must have heard it, but it made no impression on me. Beryl always spoke of him as Uncle John. I think the name must have been some very ordinary one like Brown or Williams for I have not the faintest recollection of it. Well, Mrs. Harfort wrote the news to him, and he was simply furious. He wrote that he washed his hands of Beryl and her concerns, dead or living he would never let her have a penny of his money, and when she tired of her chimney-sweep—the man was that or something equally disgraceful—she need not come cringing to him for that he had sworn never to see or speak to her again."

"Poor, poor mother!"

"Mrs. Harfort made every possible inquiry, but nothing could be discovered. She inclined to the belief that during her own absence in the summer holidays—the elopement took place in September—the teacher left in charge or the servants had connived at Beryl's meeting her lover. This was probably the case, for it was discovered she had packed a considerable portion of her wardrobe and managed to get two large boxes out of the house, which would have been impossible had no one been in her confidence."

"You were her great friend, did she never say anything to you?"

"Very little. She told me once some presentiment told her she should never keep house for her uncle; and another time, when we were discussing our favourite names she said she liked Gerald better than any other."

The younger Beryl raised her eyes to the face of her mother's friend, with a dumb imploring gaze.

"My dear child, I would tell you more if I could. I know how you must feel the suspense, but I cannot help you, it is twenty-three years ago, and though I remember your mother as vividly as though we had parted yesterday my recollections of other things are fainter. I fancy there was some talk of a young officer having been seen near the school, and some one declared later on they had seen Beryl herself in London, looking pale and ill, but that before they could get up to her she had turned down some side street and eluded them. All this, however, is vague and uncertain: but, dear child, Beryl Maitland, as I knew her, was the most loving, tender-hearted creature the world ever saw. She might have starved herself for her child's sake, but to go away to live in

luxury, not caring what became of it, would have been an impossibility to her, she simply *could not* have done it."

CHAPTER III.

SIR GEORGE ARUNDEL, Baronet, was an old man, for he had passed the age of three score years and ten by some months, but he carried himself as erectly as in his younger days, was hale and hearty still—a hard rider and a good shot, the most popular man in his county—but he had one trouble.

Of the seven sons and daughters born to him only one survived, and he was not only blind but a cripple.

It was an accident in childhood which had caused the second infirmity; but Claude Arundel had been born blind. A handsome, intellectual man, with a voice of rare sweetness, and a character which made all men his friends, it did seem hard that the heir of Fairmead should be so doubly afflicted.

He was his father's favourite son—his first-born, and poor Sir George was devoted to him; but even he had to admit Claude could not be expected to marry and keep up the old name.

It seemed likely to die out after him, and the property not being entailed he would have to adopt a stranger as his heir. Most people fancied that heir would be Hector Emsley.

Long years before Claude had been one of the Rev. Charles Emsley's private pupils, and he had kept up his friendship for the family ever since.

No one guessed that for one of them the attachment was more than friendship that had he only been as other men he would have told his love to Rosamond, and saved her from the marriage which had been such pain to her.

He and Mrs. Gordon met sometimes still, but the artist never suspected the secret hidden so well, and she wondered why Mr. Arundel should all these long years have kept up an intimacy with her brother Hector, who had been a mere baby at the time Claude was one of the Rector's pupils.

Sir George was fond of Hector, too, he was such a good shot and bold rider, it was certainly a pity that a man who seemed so fitted for a country life should live in London and earn his living by his pen, it was a very fair living too, the old baronet heard, but he always pitied Hector for his profession, and thought it a pity he should not have been born a landed proprietor.

Some days after Hector met Beryl Chesney in the fog, Sir George and his son were breakfasting, and discussing their letters, that is, Sir George read his own letters and then opened Claude's, and informed him of their contents, a little habit of the old gentleman's which, perhaps, explained why none of his son's correspondents ever wrote on private matters.

On this particular morning Claude's share of the post had not even been arrived at. Sir George was busy with the last of his own pile, which had probably been perused last because it was in a strange hand and bore a strange post-mark.

"Claude," exclaimed the old baronet, in a very agitated tone, as he at last laid down the letter, "do you think anyone would play a hoax on me?"

"Certainly not," said the blind man promptly, "what's the matter, father, who has offended you?"

Sir George rose and closed the door, and then he went back to his seat at the breakfast table, and asked gravely,—

"Can you cast your memory back twenty years, my boy?"

The "boy" was forty-five, but the father never remembered it.

"Yes," said the blind man slowly; "you are thinking of that terrible night in the snow."

"Yes," said Sir George hastily, "when the servants came to tell me they had found a woman frozen to death on my threshold, and I discovered the poor creature was . . . your brother's wife."

"I shall never forget it," said Claude, feelingly. "Gerald was weak and thoughtless, but he never

meant to be cruel. I know that poor girl must have suffered terribly, but I believe Gerald meant to act for the best."

"A pretty best," groaned the baronet; "first he was engaged to your cousin Kate, and putting off the wedding-day on all sorts of pretexts because he did not dare to be a man and say honestly he'd been married two years before to a little French girl. Then when his regiment was ordered to India, instead of telling us the truth, and letting us do the best we could for his wife, he must needs write and tell her to go back to her own home without troubling to ascertain if her friends would receive her."

"It was a story of cross purposes," said Claude sadly; "he wrote to her till, getting no answer, he thought her faithless, and she, poor girl, could not tell her letters never reached him, because they were addressed in a false name. She must have been coming to ask your help when she fainted on the terrace, and the cold and exposure did the rest."

"And Gerald died in India the same month, and but for the confession of his soldier servant we should never have known the truth. I always feel thankful, Claude, I had the poor young creature buried like a gentlewoman."

"My dear father," interposed the blind man, gently, "why revive the past? The story is sad enough, Heaven knows; but twenty years have passed since then. Why speak of it to-day?"

"Because I must," said the old baronet, excitedly. "I've had the most wonderful letter. If it isn't a hoax, Claude, you are not the last of the Arundels after all."

"Will you read it to me?" said Claude, eagerly, "for I can't understand how such a chance can be."

"Well, listen, it's dated from Harborough Castle, not a bad address."

The letter was very long, and written in the pompous wordy style of a long gone generation. Sir George had kept himself up to time so much better than his correspondent, that it occurred to him that pedantic person must be a veritable Methuselah.

But, shorn of its heavy ponderous language, the purport of the letter was plain enough. Mr. John Granger wrote to inquire if Sir George Arundel had the address of his great niece, Beryl Arundel, only child of Beryl Maitland, and of the baronet's third son Gerald. Mr. Granger went on to say, that having been much annoyed at his niece, Miss Maitland's elopement, he had sworn never to give her in his lifetime, or leave her in his will any part of his fortune; but that he had ascertained her marriage to "Gerald Randal" would hold good in any court, she not knowing the name of Randal was assumed.

Bound by his oath he could leave his niece nothing, but he was possessed of considerable property, about a quarter of a million, and he intended to bequeath the whole of it to Beryl Arundel her only child. He was quite ignorant of his niece's whereabouts, though he knew, from the papers of her husband's death. Being an old man, verging on eighty, he had a claim to some indulgence. He begged therefore that Sir George would send him word of the young lady's whereabouts, and as her guardian consent to her paying a brief visit to Castle Harborough.

"There is such a place," said Claude, quickly, "and a Mr. Granger does live there. He is reported to be as rich as a nabob."

"I don't care if he's a pauper, Claude; how can you think of other things, when you know I'm so anxious to find out if it's true."

"I should say yes."

"Why?"

"Because Gascyne (Gerald's servant) declared there was a child, only he gave us to understand it died. Depend upon it Mr. Granger has verified the little girl's birth and christening, or he wouldn't be so sure of her name."

"Little girl!" almost roared Sir George, "she'd be a woman grown, two and twenty at the least."

"Depend upon it they had fallen on evil times, the mother and child. That poor girl came here as a last resource, not for her own sake but for her baby's."

"But what is to be done?" cried Sir George.

"She may have starved all these years, or been sent to the workhouse."

"If you could keep your temper—I should fancy he was a very fidgetty, exasperating old man—you'd better go down to Castle Harborough and interview Mr. John Granger."

Sir George Arundel said he would have nothing to do with the malevolent old idiot, whose revengeful spirit had kept the secret of the younger Beryl's existence all these years, but Claude soon talked him into a smoother frame of mind, and it was agreed at last that he should write Mr. Granger a civil letter announcing his intention of visiting him the following day.

"I would go in your stead willingly," said Claude, cheerfully, "but he might resent the infliction of a blind guest; besides, father, you saw Gerald's wife. If there are any portraits of Beryl Maitland at the Castle you will be able to set one question at rest for ever."

Sir George reached Harborough Station about three o'clock. A very handsome old-fashioned carriage was waiting for him, which proved not only that the nabob had received his letter, but that he intended to meet him amicably.

It was only two miles to the Castle, a very modern-looking building, which somehow jarred on the baronet's taste by its lavish display of wealth. He could not afford such extravagant expenditure at Fairmead, which was some centuries older than the Castle.

A little old man in a black velvet suit, and wearing a skull cap over his scanty hair, came forward to receive his visitor. So tiny did Mr. Granger appear before the tall, broad-shouldered baronet, that Sir George felt himself a little like Gulliver when he met the first inhabitant of Lilliput, but he took the Nabob's offered hand and followed him gravely to the library.

"It is most kind of you to do me this honour," said the little man, "but really you have been put to needless trouble. My great niece could have made the journey under some servant's care. I am anxious to see my heiress, though I will never look on her mother's face again."

"My good sir," began poor Sir George rather helplessly, "don't speak harshly of the dead; if Beryl Maitland was my son Gerald's wife, you never can look upon her face again for the grave has closed over it these twenty years."

The little old gentleman looked terribly subdued.

"I think I have been badly treated," he said querulously, "it would only have been courteous to write and tell me."

"Courteous, but impossible," said Sir George. "Until I received your letter yesterday I had no idea even of the maiden name of Gerald's wife, let alone her relations. If you will listen to me, Mr. Granger, I will tell you all I know of her. It is a sad story, and one I have never been able to forget."

With a certain rugged pathos the baronet told of the heavy snow-storm some twenty years before, and of the still, cold form found dead upon his threshold the following day. Of how some terrible doubts of his son Gerald had made him guess a little of the truth, and had the poor young stranger reverently laid to rest in Fairmead churchyard.

"My son Gerald died about the same time in India," went on Sir George, "and from his soldier servant we learnt sufficient to make us understand the poor young stranger was his wife. I thought her story too sad to publish, so I did not place the name of Arundel on her grave, but it is marked by a marble cross and the date of her death. Gascyne—the man referred to—said there had been a baby, but it died."

"There were two babies," said the Nabob gently; "probably but for the expected arrival of the second, Beryl would have accompanied her husband to India. Her boy was born a week after Captain Arundel sailed."

"And he is alive?"

"He died a few days later—as I told you in my letter—there is but one living child—Beryl."

"But where is she?" Sir George forgot his son's advice, and fairly lost his temper. "Hang it all, sir, this girl is the last of the Arundels, the heiress of my house, she must be found!"

"I don't know anything about your house,"

said the little man sharply. "She is my heiress and as such I shall institute a search for her at once. Harborough Castle and a quarter of a million can't be left without an owner!"

Sir George did his best to conciliate the Nabob, with such success that the old man produced some dozen letters, their envelopes yellow with age, their seals unbroken. All were addressed to,—

"MRS. RANDAL,

c/o John Granger, Esq.,

Castle Harboro'."

and they had evidently been written by Gerald Arundel, in the firm belief that his wife and child had found a shelter with her uncle.

"I never read other peoples' letters. I should scorn to open one of them," said the old Nabob; "but you may have fewer scruples."

"Hang it all," cried Sir George, "I'm not unscrupulous, but it seems to me in this case we must think of the living. If there's any clue to Gerald's daughter anywhere it's in those letters."

Mr. Granger bowed courteously.

"You have my permission to read them."

But, alas! they told very little. The first one or two alluded to the lodgings in South Audley-street, where Gerald had left his wife and suggested cheerfully she must find Harborough Castle a pleasant change after Mrs. Mason's drawing-room floor.

There were anxious inquiries about her little daughter, and instructions that the baby should be called Claude or Claudia, according to its sex.

A few weeks later Gerald had evidently grown uneasy at his wife's silence. He confessed he had deceived her as to his name, but urged her to forgive the deception for their children's sake.

"There's only one clue," said Sir George, as he laid down the last letter. "It's evident Gerald left his wife in lodgings in South Audley-street. Would it be possible to find the landlady? It is just a chance she may have kept the little girl out of charity all these years."

"I do not care to imagine my heiress living on charity all these years," replied Mr. Granger, irritably.

"Hang it all, sir, she's my heiress as well as yours. I don't say I like the prospect of finding Miss Arundel a pensioner on Mrs. Mason's charity, but it's better than thinking of the poor girl as lost. I shall remain in London to-night and to-morrow I mean to go to South Audley-street and seek out Mrs. Mason."

The Nabob condescended to give a little information.

"She kept a milliner's shop. I went there once; it was just after Gerald Arundel deserted his wife, for I shall always think he did desert her."

Sir George winced.

"Having seen Mrs. Mason once, would you prefer to go to her now? Do you think you would have a better chance of finding her?"

"No, I don't," said John Granger, with the supreme selfishness sometimes found in the very old. "I'm nearly eighty, and I never mean to set foot in London again. I've made my will, and left all I die possessed of to my great niece Beryl Arundel. That's more than she has any right to expect, and I shan't do any more for her; if you like to go rushing about the world looking for a girl who ought never to have been lost it's your business. I shall stay at home."

Sir George was only nine years younger than the Nabob, but he felt almost like a boy compared to the little shrivelled-up, wizened-faced Anglo-Indian.

He went back to London that night, hoping if he lived to be eighty he should not resemble Mr. John Granger.

To his intense relief the milliner's shop was still in existence, and though the very smart "young lady" in the showroom declared "Mrs. Mason was ill and could see no one," Sir George's card, with a pencilled request to see her on urgent private business, so aroused the good matron's curiosity that she agreed to receive him at once, and he was ushered into a room where a very stylish-looking woman of about fifty reclined on a sofa, dressed in a rose-coloured

peignoir which, in itself, was an advertisement of her skill.

She received Sir George precisely as though she had been his equal.

Of late years her business had been so entirely among the upper ten that she began to think herself quite one of themselves; but when, in a few words, the baronet said he had come in reference to some lodgers of hers whom he was most anxious to trace and asked if she remembered the name of "Randal," the *modiste* forgot her rôle and spoke with her natural warmth of language.

"Oh, sir, if you'll only tell me Mrs. Randal's well and prosperous I'd lick your shoes."

"She has been dead for twenty years, but," seeing the clouds gather on Mrs. Mason's face, "if you were a friend of hers you will be glad to be of help to her child. I came here in hopes you might aid me in tracing her daughter."

All the veneer and polish acquired by years of fashionable trade departed. Mrs. Mason spoke as plainly and humbly as one of Sir George's own servants.

"It's the only hard thing I've ever done since I started, and I've repented of it so long I think I must have wiped it out. We were young beginners then, Mason and I, and the rent was a great thing to us. Mrs. Randal had been here three months. Her baby boy was born here. She paid regularly; but no news came from her husband, and I could see her little stock of money was dwindling away. I said to Mason (he's dead, now poor man) we won't wait till she's not a penny in the world, or we'll never bring ourselves to turn her out. I'll tell her the season's beginning, and we can get higher rent if she'd please to suit herself. I did a little more, for I told her, seeing she'd no money coming in she'd do better to take rooms at less than two guineas a week, and I said over the East-end of London she'd not pay the half. She wasn't offended. She thanked me as if I'd done her a kindness, and said she'd look out at once; which part did I advise. So I told her Hackney was healthy and cheap. She moved within the week, and I promised I'd send on her letters. None ever came. The card she left me with her address written down grew yellow with age. If you'll believe me, Sir, I felt that troubled about her that once, years after, being in Hackney, I went down the Carley-road and looked at No. 49. I think I'd got it in my mind to call and see her; but the house was empty. Some children were playing about, and I asked them who had lived there, and they said the minister, Mr. Chesney. Of course, I knew Mrs. Randal couldn't have lodged there lately, for though I haven't much with ministers I'm sure they don't let apartments."

Sir George groaned.

"How am I to find the child? She must have been two years' old at the time of her mother's death."

"Well," Mrs. Mason spoke slowly, for she felt perplexed. "If Mrs. Randal didn't get richer, the chances are she stayed in Hackney. It costs something to move. I know she went to 49, Carley-road, for I met her once after she left me, and she told me she was very comfortable there. It's possible the landlord might tell you who occupied the house before the minister. If you traced out Mrs. Randal's landlady she might know something."

It was a forlorn hope, but Sir George could think of no better plan, so he thanked the handsome milliner and departed.

CHAPTER IV.

It was early in the New Year, and Mrs. Gordon sat alone in her pretty drawing-room thinking of the sunshine which had come into her life with Beryl Chesney's arrival.

The minister's adopted child still bore his name. Some strange sensitive shrinking made Beryl herself prefer this:

"You see he lent it to me," she said, wistfully; "and so I seem to have a sort of claim to it; and I think, Mrs. Gordon, you are right when you say my own mother's name was not Randal at all, only she used it to hide her own."

For two months Beryl had been the sunshine of Ivy Lodge, and the artist peremptorily denied that she was a burden.

"Ask all my friends if you doubt me; they will tell you the same story that I have talked of getting a companion a dozen times. I hate being alone, and there are so many odds and ends I have no time to see to, I really want some one to help me. I should have advertised long ago only I dreaded the dozens of answers from unsuitable people, and Beryl, years ago I longed for a daughter of my own. You are the child of my dearest friend, and in having you it seems almost as though my old wish had been granted to me."

And Beryl having discovered there really was work for her at the pretty house in Fulham ceased to struggle with her good fortune, but gave herself up to the delight of being happy, for life at Ivy Lodge was a fuller, richer thing than any life she had ever led before.

"And Beryl," said her kind friend, "take my advice and do not write to Ashbury at present. If I know anything of men, losing you will only have made Mr. Algernon more devoted. So long as Mrs. Chesney does not know your address she can truthfully say so; but, if she is dependent in any way on the Hodsons' goodwill she might be sorely tempted to betray you to them!"

None of Mrs. Gordon's friends were trusted with her *protégée's* history. They all knew that the artist had met Miss Chesney on one of her summer holidays, and begged her if ever she needed to leave home to come and live with her, but that the "home" had been at Ashbury, and the man for whom she still wore mourning had not been her father at all was kept secret.

"I shall not even tell Hector," Mrs. Gordon decided promptly; "men are so stupid, he might let it out. Not that he is a great talker, poor boy, he seems to me to have grown into a perfect hermit."

"How can you call him a boy?"

"Well, my child, twenty-nine is not old age, and compared to me Hector seems very young."

"I thought he was forty."

Rosamond had heard all about the meeting in the fog from Beryl, Hector had never troubled to mention it. The artist was lacking in one womanly talent, she was not in the least a match-maker, so she said placidly,—

"I daresay, but most likely he showed you his worst side. Hector hates and despises all women, though I believe he does make me an honourable exception. Long ago he was jilted by a frivolous little butterfly and he has never got over it."

"What became of her?" asked Beryl, with unwonted curiosity.

"Well, you see, Hector was as poor as a church mouse, and didn't seem to have much prospect of ever being anything else. They had been engaged two years, and her parents were in desperate difficulties. I always try to persuade myself she did it for their sake; anyhow, she married a retired dealer in second-hand clothes who had more money than his. They live on Clapham Common in very grand style, and are visited by a great many other retired Jews. Mrs. Levi does not belong to my set, thank goodness, for I don't think I could be civil to her when I remember how she treated Hector, though it happened seven years ago."

"And she spoils Mr. Emley's life?"

"She spoils it so far as happiness and a home of his own went. I suppose worldly people would say she 'made' him. He was a clerk in the Civil Service when it happened; then he began to write, and his manuscripts somehow 'took.' I don't mean that he's famous or anything like that, but he earns six or seven hundred a year, and has given up the clerkship years ago."

This little confidence gave Beryl a new interest in Hector Emley. She had always liked him ever since the November day when he found her in the fog; but now she often felt herself wondering whether he still regretted Mrs. Levi, and if it was for Blanche's fickle sake that he was so grave and silent for his years; somehow Beryl Chesney did not judge Mrs. Levi as harshly as Mrs. Gordon did. Beryl had not forgotten her own temptation, and how nearly she had been driven into marrying Algernon Hodson.

Something wonderful happened that evening.

Mrs. Gordon went to a large dinner party of professional celebrities, to which Beryl had not been bidden, and the girl sat alone in the pretty drawing-room reading a novel, but only giving it a very divided attention, for some strange power she could not understand, made her thoughts wander continually to Ashbury.

"Mr. Emley, Miss," said the parlour-maid's voice, opening the door. "I told him the mistress was out, but he asked for you."

"How disappointing for you," said Beryl simply, as Hector took a chair opposite her, "to brave the horrors of the snow, and then find your sister out, and she has gone to a grand dinner-party the other side of London, so she won't be home till late."

"I know," said Hector coolly, "they asked me. I came to-night because I wanted to see you alone. Miss Chesney, do you ever read the newspapers?"

"Very rarely; I was brought up by people who thought them wicked, and though I never caught the prejudice the old prohibition has, perhaps, made me very indifferent to them."

"Ah!—then you have not seen this?" He took from his pocket-book a cutting from the *Times* and read aloud,—

"Ashbury. If Beryl, who left her home in November, will send her address to M. C., all can be arranged."

Dead silence. Beryl kept her eyes fixed on the soft fur rug.

At last Hector said—"The first day I ever saw you you told me you came from Ashbury. I don't know the place, and there may be two Beryls living there, but I can't believe they both left their home last November."

"It means me," said Beryl hopelessly. "Oh! Mr. Emley, don't betray me!"

"I never betrayed anyone in my life. Child, can't you trust me? I am not blind, I know, of course, some heavy trouble made you come to my sister, but if the M. C. of the advertisement is your mother it is cruel to hide yourself away from her."

"M. C. is my foster-mother; I love her dearly, but I can't send her my address."

"Why not?" pretty sharply.

"Because she does not want it for herself, and . . . she is very poor; if she knew where I was she would not dare to refuse to tell them."

"Mysterious pronoun," said Hector, "I suppose it represents a lover. Little girl, you have a face pretty enough to break men's hearts, don't you think you might be merciful?"

"I gave up my home to be free from him," sobbed the girl; "I told him as plainly as I could that I hated him, and if he finds me it will all begin over again, and mother will tell me I ought to marry him because he is rich and we are poor."

Hector Emley's hand rested gravely on her shoulder.

"There was no promise given, then?"

"Promise" cried Beryl, indignantly; "why I never dreamed Mr. Hodson wanted to marry me till he came the day after my father's funeral and said so. He wouldn't believe I meant 'no,' he said I did not know what I was refusing, but he would be generous, and give me a week for consideration. He and his mother are two of the chapel managers; they could have made things very hard for my foster-mother and the children, so before the week was up I came away and left Mrs. Chesney free to say, truthfully, she did not know where I was."

"And Mr. Hodson was rich?"

"He is the richest man in Ashbury and, I think, the plainest."

Hector smiled.

"All these weeks I fancied you were fretting over a love quarrel."

"I never had a lover in my life, unless you count Mr. Hodson."

"And you are free?"

"Free from any love troubles—I have a very great anxiety on my mind, but it is nothing to do with love; at least it happened twenty years ago."

"Never mind what happened twenty years ago, I want to tell you of something which

happened last November. I lost my heart. For seven long years, Beryl, I have scoffed at love; for seven long years I have believed all women false; but that morning in the fog it came home to me that if ever there was truth anywhere it was in your violet eyes. Little one, my world-tossed heart is not worthy your pure innocence, but I love you, dearest, and if only you will trust me, I can protect you against all the chapel-managers in the world."

"But—Mrs. Gordon told me you were in love with—some one else. I mean that you had never got over it."

"I 'got over' it on her wedding-day—I can't offer you my past, Beryl, but the love of my manhood is yours, if only you can care for me."

"I care very much."

"Then you will be my wife?"

"I cannot. You don't understand. I am not Beryl Chesney really: I am just a waif or a stray, with no name of her own;" and she told him the story of Mrs. Chesney's beautiful lodger and her mysterious disappearance.

"She went to her own people for help, and died before she reached them, I expect," said Hector, gravely. "Why should that part us? Your mother was my sister's dearest friend. If there be any doubt about your name, you can be married as Beryl Chesney, otherwise Beryl Randal. I don't mind how you are named, so that I have you safe in my own keeping."

"But won't it hurt you?"

"What?"

"The disgrace."

Hector Emsley took the girl in his arms and strained her to his heart.

"My darling, disgrace can never touch you. I love you, and should want you for my wife just the same, even if we discovered your father had been hanged for murder."

"Mrs. Gordon will be angry."

"No, she won't. Rosamond suffered so much from a marriage in which love had no part, that she is very sympathetic to all lovers. I shall come and see her to-morrow; and as to this," touching the advertisement, "shall we let the matter rest until you are Beryl Emsley? or would you like me to go and call on Mrs. Chesney and tell her that I have cut out Mr. Algernon?"

CHAPTER V.

ROSAMOND GORDON took the news with great amazement, not unmixed with a pity for the bride-elect, which made Beryl a little indignant.

"My dear child, aren't you afraid to spend your life with such a bear? Hector is true to the core, and I am very fond of him; but he is as hard as iron, and you are such a tender creature."

"I don't think he will be hard on me, and he has always seemed to me like a hero, only I am a shocking bad match for him. I was afraid you would be disappointed."

"I think you will make the dearest little sister in the world; only you are too yielding—you'll let Hector have his own way in all things."

And to her brother Rosamond spoke very kindly, only adding one word of warning.

"We haven't the least proof that her father wasn't an unutterable scoundrel. Hector, if you think anything could make you regret your marriage it would be kinder to draw back now. Beryl is very sensitive, and if she found you were ashamed of her she would break her heart."

Hector smiled.

"She shall never have cause to fancy that. And now, sister mine, comes a great question. We have decided not to communicate with Mrs. Chesney until Beryl is my wife. We will be married after Easter, as quietly as possible. But, remembering all the kindness they have shown me, ought not Sir George Arundel and his son be asked to the wedding?"

"Write and tell them of the engagement, then be guided by their reply. Sir George tells me every time we meet you ought to marry; but he is, or used to be, a very ambitious man,

and he may, not knowing Beryl, think you are throwing yourself away."

Mr. Emsley was not prepared for the result of his letter to Claude. The very next day, as he was sitting writing a magazine article, Sir George and his son were announced.

"We've come to congratulate you," said the baronet bluntly, "and to ask you a few questions. Are Miss Chesney's parents living?"

No inquiry could have been more embarrassing, Hector hated to own the mystery which hung over Beryl's mother, while of her father he knew absolutely nothing. He was unutterably relieved when the blind man came to his assistance.

"Hector, old fellow," said Claude Arundel, "forgive my father his abruptness. We have a great interest in your reply, for nearly two months we have been seeking my brother Gerald's only child, whose name, like your fiancée's, is Beryl. We have been to Ashbury, where she lived for years as the reputed child of a Wesleyan minister, who died last autumn. His widow declares she has no idea of her foster child's address; and though advertisements have been inserted repeatedly in the papers, we have heard not a word of the missing girl until I got your letter. The same thought came to us both, could your fiancée be our lost Beryl?"

"My Beryl is the daughter of Rosamond's old friend, Beryl Maitland, and her husband. He went by the name of Randal, but I suspect it was assumed. Beryl's mother went out one winter day and never returned. The people of the house, a poverty-stricken minister and his wife, out of Christian charity adopted the little one."

Sir George wrung the author's hand.

"I always liked you, Hector; you're the best rider I know, and now you'll be my grandson. I suppose there'll be some legal form to go through; but I am perfectly satisfied that your Beryl is my grandchild, and I shall give her a portion worthy of the Arundels!"

Claude smiled.

"And when the blind man's life is ended you and Beryl will rule at Fairmead. Hector, I may tell you now, in all the world I know no one I would so soon think of as master there."

"But we're forgetting the Nabob," said Sir George, laughing. "My dear boy, your bride will be weighed down with gold, for her mother's uncle has come to his senses and made a will leaving her his money. It's about a quarter of a million, and as Mr. Grainger looks about a hundred now, it can't be so very long before he's called to his account."

Very grave and set grew Hector Emsley's features.

"I shall have to give her up," he said hoarsely.

"I am a poor man, no fit husband for an heiress."

"If you threaten anything of that sort, young man, I shall make you my heir instead of Beryl," said Claude cheerfully. "I won't have my unknown niece jilted."

"At least I shall offer her her freedom," said Hector gravely, "and I cannot blame her if she accepts it."

But Beryl, instead of accepting it, burst into a storm of tears, and declared if Hector deserted her she should be miserable all her life, and she would a great deal sooner give up her name, her fortune, and her new found relations than lose her lover.

Every legal formality was complied with, and then Beryl Arundel and her grandfather went down to Ashbury, and called at the shabby house in the New-road. Their errand there was a very pleasant one. Sir George told Mrs. Chesney he could never forget all the years she had been a mother to Beryl, her love no money could repay, but as a slight proof of his gratitude he begged her to accept an allowance of four hundred a year for the rest of his life. A deed was already drawn up settling this income on her, and in a few days she would receive a cheque for the first quarter from his lawyers.

"I shall never forget your kindness, sir," said Mrs. Chesney, tearfully. "I loved Beryl as though she had been my own, and I never looked for a penny; but, oh, sir, it will be a comfort to have a regular income and to be able to snap my fingers at the chapel managers."

The last phrase clung to Sir George's memory strangely. He often asked Beryl in later years if Mrs. Chesney had grown tired of snapping her fingers.

Beryl never visited the owner of Castle Harborough. He died very soon after her parentage was established; but at Hector's wish, backed up by Sir George's authority, the wedding was not delayed on that account. It took place in Fairmead parish church on a sunny April day. Sir George gave his grandchild away. Mrs. Gordon, in defiance of all etiquette, held the bride's gloves, and Claude stood next her beloved Hector.

Whether it was their position on this occasion or the old saying, "One marriage makes another," which brought about the happy event we know not; but when the year was a little older there was a second wedding at Fairmead, when Rosamond Gordon became Claude Arundel's happy wife.

Crippled and blind, he had yet always been very dear to her, while she had, from her earliest childhood, been his heart's best love.

Mr. and Mrs. Arundel live with Sir George at Fairmead.

Beryl Emsley and her husband have two homes of their own—a town house, and Castle Harborough—but they find time to pay long visits to Fairmead, and the childless couple there delight in Beryl's boy Gerald, who will one day rule in the grand old home.

Beryl never returned to Ashbury; but Mrs. Chesney and the children have paid her several visits since her marriage, and the widow knows quite well, when any of her brood want a start in life, Mrs. Emsley's purse will be ready to give it them.

As for Algernon Hodson, he is unmarried still, and his mother rules him with wonderful tact. He has never proposed to another girl, or spoken of love to any woman since the day after the minister's funeral, when he went down to the shabby little house in the New-road with the offer which was to be "BERYL'S TEMPTATION."

[THE END.]

MARSH FAIRY.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE little figure that entered Grace Thornton's boudoir was prettily if inexpensively gowned. The dress fitted the *swell* form with an easy perfection that is not always to be observed in a Parisian costume, though Nurse Dawson's own hands had fashioned it. There was a dainty little hat upon the head, and a pair of well-made boots covered the feet that knew more of hard paving-stones than of leather.

But it was the flush upon Olive's cheeks that made her so radiantly beautiful as she stood there with the afternoon sun shining upon her lovely head. No art could ever have improved that. No hand but Heaven's could have fashioned a beauty such as hers.

Nurse Dawson was sitting in her accustomed seat by the window, with her inevitable sewing in her hand. She had grown decidedly paler since Olive had been under the same roof, and there was a weariness in her manner that caused kind-hearted Grace Thornton to look at her in some alarm, but she flushed slightly as Olive entered.

"How like your mother you look to-day!" she exclaimed, as Olive stood there for a moment without speaking. "I never noticed the likeness so strong before."

Olive coloured.

"Did you—did you like my mother, nurse?" she questioned hesitatingly.

"I loved her as my own child."

The old woman looked over her spectacles and out into the street. There was a curious tremor in her voice as she spoke of the old love that touched Olive, as she went to the back of the chair, and leaning over, pressed her cheek against

the wrinkled one that she had kissed so often in her childhood.

"Tell me of her, nurse," she said, almost below her breath.

Mrs. Dawson started. For a moment, Olive thought, she even trembled, then she moved away a trifle uneasily.

"Not to-day, dearie," she answered, unsteadily. "Some other time."

"You have promised often."

"I know, and some day I will keep my word, but not now. Where are you going?"

"To see my father. Mr. Chatteris has sent to tell me that I may. I came to ask if you will go with me, nurse."

The woman sprung suddenly to her feet, scattering her sewing about her. She caught the back of her chair for a moment as if she needed its support, then she stood glaring down upon Olive.

"No!" she cried hoarsely, scarcely conscious of the word she had spoken. "No! Don't ask me! I can't! I tell you, I can't!"

Then seeming to realise what she had done, she sank down again upon the chair, trembling in every limb, and looked up at Olive with almost wild horror.

For a moment the girl was silent, staring at her with a grief in the great eyes that was piteous.

"Do you mean that you think my father guilty of that crime, Nurse Dawson?" she asked, at last, in a tone that the cringing woman never forgot. "Do you mean that you think my father killed my mother in the horrible, cowardly way that they say he did?"

There was something in the tone that demanded an answer. There was something in the commanding presence of the small figure that compelled the truth, and with head bowed upon her bosom and face white as death, Nurse Dawson replied in an almost inaudible whisper:

"No!"

The answer startled the girl as no outburst could have done. She, too, had grown pale as death, and her sensitive lips twitched nervously. After a moment of inactivity, she went up to the woman, and kneeling down in front of her, she placed her hands upon the wrinkled, trembling ones of her former nurse.

"You mean something," Olive said, impressively, "something strange—something awful, perhaps. What is it? Why will you not go to my father when you believe in his innocence? You are an old friend. You know what good it would do that sick, and, perhaps, dying man to look upon the familiar face of a friend who trusted still in his honour, in spite of the horrible accusation that the world has put upon him. You know that—"

But before she could complete the sentence, the woman had shaken off her detaining hand, and had sprung to her feet again.

"Don't talk to me of it now," she gasped. "Wait! I can't do what you ask at once. Not now. To-morrow."

And before Olive could speak she was gone.

It was a singular conversation, and one which made an impression upon Olive, but she strove to throw off its influence and went to join Noel Chatteris.

He did not appear to observe the change in her costume—Olive doubted that he even saw her—but his tone was quick and business-like as he exclaimed:

"You are exactly three minutes late, and there is not much time to lose. The hours are not long, you know."

The mild reproof hurt her cruelly, and her eyes filled with tears, but she controlled her voice quickly, and said quietly:

"I am very sorry to have kept you waiting, and I shall try not to do it again. How is he to-day?"

"Your father?"

"Yes."

"No better."

"Oh—"

"There! Don't wish to have it otherwise. I would not have him get better now for anything."

"Why?"

"Don't you understand that they would re-

move him at once if his health would permit it?"

"Then you have discovered nothing new?" asked Olive, with a sigh—"nothing that can help him?"

"Not a thing," he answered, a wearied expression crossing his countenance. "But I am not despairing. I shall discover it yet."

"You are good to say that—so good! And you have seen—Miss Naylor?"

His face hardened.

"Yes."

"And she—"

"Don't let us speak of her—at least, not now. She has disappointed me, I confess, though perhaps I am wrong to speak of it. But I shall go on!"

Olive sighed and did not speak. He looked at her after a moment and saw how white and drawn her face had grown. He knew of what she was thinking, and her generosity aroused all the passion in him.

"You would sacrifice yourself for the sake of another," he cried—"another who hates you and would do nothing to serve you? You are foolish. Why should you care?"

"It is not for her I care; it is for you. Do I not know that the happiness of your whole life is hanging by a thread, and that the end of it is in my hands?"

He started almost cruelly and looked at her. Her eyes were not directed toward him, and as he looked, a curious change came over him. He whitened to the lips, and a sort of horror crept into his eyes as if the first suspicion of a hitherto unsuspected truth had just dawned upon him.

"Good Heavens!" he whispered, with a sort of inward shudder, "it can't be that I— No, no! I won't be fool enough nor knave enough to even admit it to myself! It is madness!"

But for all that the horror of the discovery was upon him. He dared not question his own heart—he dared not ask himself the question: "Is it possible that I am learning to love this child?" But for all that he was groaning in soul as the man does who has received a mortal wound, and to whom the knowledge has come with fearful import.

(Continued on page 500)

A BRAVE HEART.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THERE was considerable delight and satisfaction among the young folk of Croomehurst when they received the intimation from Molly Fothergill that despite Mrs. Seaton's enforced absence the pantomime would still take place, and that none of the gaieties that had been looked forward to with so much excitement and pleasure would be curtailed.

Mr. St. Leger came forward to offer himself as a substitute for Mrs. Seaton as general arranger and writer for the amateurs, and everything was carried on at Croome just as it had been before the day when such great and sad news had been brought to Justina.

The only difference noticeable at the rehearsals was the absence of Leam Greatorex and Sir Basil, as well as the non-appearance of the gentle, lovely authoress. Molly flung herself heart and soul into the bustle of the moment, in fact, she was rather grateful to these theatricals, they helped her to fling over the excitement that was so great within her as to be almost a pain.

News had come from Basil signifying his due arrival in Paris, but after that the days went by without word or sign of him.

Justina, shut in in her tiny home, scarcely knew how these days passed. She tried to settle to her writing, but she was restless, agitated, troubled, almost feverish. She was, of course, invisible to all except to Molly and her aunt. If she could have studied her own feelings Justina would have gladly dispensed with Lady Sartoris' visit, but this was something she could not insist upon, and

with a new and rather marked show of consideration Lady Sartoris appeared regularly each day at the small house to spend an hour with her niece. She was frankness itself to her daughters.

"Justina will of course marry Sir Basil, now that she is free, and it is advisable in every sense that we should be friendly with her."

The two girls, who had never been trained to have any will or character except that which their mother owned, naturally agreed to this worldly-wise remark; but Justina was chafed and fretted beyond description by her aunt's suddenly developed kindness. She longed and yet dreaded for the day of Basil's return.

There was no sort of love's sorrow in her heart over this death of her husband.

Rupert Seaton had done nothing but bring evil to and upon her; he had destroyed every sort of lingering affection the girl might have had; he had been base, dishonourable and dishonouring.

Still Justina's gentle woman's heart could not grow utterly hard to him. This news of his untimely death touched her most keenly. He was so young to die, and so unfit.

She had known nothing of the sort of life he had led since they had been apart, but she had no need of knowledge to assure her that remorse and re-awakened conscience had had no time to touch him, and bring better thoughts into his mind before he passed away from earth for ever.

Justina was so grateful to Molly for her sweet and tactful love. The hours spent by them together in this strange troubled week were full of tenderness and beauty to them both. They had never seemed so closely drawn together as in this time, and yet the subject and cause of Basil's absence was not even touched upon between them.

Molly chattered about everything; she brought the latest news of the rehearsals, she laughed over the awkwardness, and the humour, and the small disagreements that go to swell the meaning of all amateur theatricals. She was full of praise for Mr. St. Leger and his cleverness.

"I don't like him one bit better than I did, but it is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that he is extraordinarily clever," she would say over and over again.

Justina always tried to fling herself into the events of the moment. She inquired after that point and this matter, and joined now and then in a faint echo of Molly's laughter. Once only she mentioned Leam's name.

"And Miss Greatorex; is she with you every day, Molly?"

Molly shook her head.

"No, Leam has not been for ages; but then her mother has been rather seriously unwell. Dr. Wyllie told me the other day he was not at all satisfied with Lady Gertrude's condition. With all Leam's faults," Molly added, "I must give her the credit of being an exemplary daughter. I confess I should never have had half the patience with Lady Gertrude that Leam has."

Justina made no answer to this. She could never quite overcome a sort of repugnance she had to hearing the sound of Leam Greatorex's name mentioned.

It was impossible for her to describe exactly the sensation that came over her when she let her thoughts dwell upon Leam; there was something painful in this sensation—a coldness and a heaviness as though some unconscious part of her could see into the future, and by so doing recognise shadow and sorrow to come to her through the influence of this woman who had not scrupled to show her dislike and antipathy in so public a manner.

Since the affair of that morning at rehearsal this shrinking on Justina's part from all chance of contact with Miss Greatorex would have been absolutely comprehensible to herself and to every one; but Justina knew well that she had not needed Leam's outward insult to tell her that she was hated and depreciated.

The event that followed on that memorable occasion, and the trouble and anxiety of the past days while her fate as it were hung in the balance had robbed the girl's mind of the remembrance of Leam, at least in very definite form; but this

little conversation with Molly reawakened all Justin's uncomfortable feelings where Leam was concerned, making the weighty burden of her thoughts still more heavy and difficult to bear.

When a week had gone Sir Basil suddenly telegraphed his return. The news came in the middle of the last rehearsal. The owner of Croome Hall would be in good time to witness the celebrated pantomime.

Molly gave a great sigh of relief as Basil's message was put into her hands. She was standing near the piano, where Mr. St. Leger was busy going over and over again through some of the music.

His quick eyes had caught sight of the telegram the instant it arrived—a curious expression passed over his face; it was not unlike an expression of nervousness and fear. It was gone immediately, and as Molly gave vent to an exclamation of pleasure his accustomed smile played on Mr. St. Leger's features.

"Sir Basil's return is good news," he said in a decourty sort of way.

"It is indeed," Molly answered, heartily. "I never know how much I need Basil till he comes back after an absence."

Mr. St. Leger ceased playing abruptly. They were alone for the moment, most of the company were in another room having final touches and arrangements put to their fanciful costumes, and worrying the unfortunate perruquier and costurmer almost to distraction with all that was required of them at the last moment.

"I wonder what news he will bring," the man said, suddenly.

Molly folded up the telegram. She looked very cool and quiet; but as a matter-of-fact she was trembling all over with excitement, so much, so very, very much depended upon what Basil would have to say when he arrived.

"Do you think there is any doubt about this reported death, Mr. St. Leger?" she asked in a low voice, and very hurriedly.

Unconsciously, almost, Molly had begun to build up a beautiful castle for the future of these two she loved so well.

She had not let her thoughts become very definite, yet the dream, the hope had been there, and she had not pushed it from her.

Now a cold feeling came upon her that perhaps these thoughts had been premature, and would have to die away altogether if Basil's report should be a contradiction of the story Mrs. Baines, the landlady, had brought.

St. Leger answered her immediately.

"My dear Miss Fothergill, I have no kind of thought one way or the other. Seaton's life for many months past now has been a sealed book to me—he has gone out of my existence. Had I seen or heard anything about him lately I could of course express an opinion on the matter; but, as it is— He broke off and shrugged his shoulders; after a moment he continued with all his usual ease. "But Sir Basil will soon be here to tell us the whole truth. I hope it is not very wrong of me; but I confess, Miss Fothergill, if your brother does bring confirmation of this report I shall be tempted almost to offer that poor child my hearty congratulations. Her life is too young and her nature too beautiful to be condemned to an existence of perpetual shadow and suffering."

Molly gave the speaker a glance of approval. His tone was so warm and so sincere she almost forgot in this moment her natural instinct of dislike for him.

Lord Dunchester came springing on to the platform at this particular instant, and as he joined them, St. Leger moved away.

"Philip, I have just heard from Basil; he will be home to-night, look." Molly held out the telegram to the Earl as she spoke.

The young man did not take it; his brows were contracted into a frown, and he looked strangely out of temper.

"What an awful flirt you are, Molly," was his answer to Miss Fothergill's information.

Molly coloured vividly and turned on him sharply.

"Flirt! What on earth do you mean?"

Her tone was indignant amazement and asperity mingled. Lord Dunchester, however, was not frightened by this tone.

"I mean what I say. You are a desperate flirt, Molly."

Molly straightened herself.

"And with whom have I been flirting last, may I ask?" she inquired, frigidly.

"As if you did not know very well! You have been whispering together for the last hour, and, after all, though he is an amusing chap, I own still he is a little bit of an outsider. You know—"

"And who was it, pray, who insisted on bringing this 'little bit of an outsider' down to Croomehurst and introducing him to everyone here?" Molly was now very angry. "You are distinctly impertinent, let me tell you, Lord Dunchester, and please understand it is absolutely no business of your's who I flirt with, or who I do not flirt with. One thing is very certain; you will be in no danger of being invited to this amusement."

Lord Dunchester, sat down crashed upon the music stool.

"Now you are cross with me," he said, helplessly.

"I am, most decidedly," was Molly's remark, given with a snap.

She was gathering up her belongings that were lying on the top of the piano, and after that she intended to go.

The big room was now deserted, the lights were only lit in the neighbourhood of the stage. The rest of the wide, grand apartment was hidden in grey dusky shadows.

"I did not mean to be rude, Molly," the young man said, humbly.

"What you mean and what you do are two very different things, evidently!" Miss Fothergill remarked in answer to this, and then her anger flamed out. "How dare you imagine such nasty things about me, Philip! I am not a flirt, and as for Mr. St. Leger, well, here Molly paused—" he is your friend, consequently, he is received here, otherwise I do not think I should include him among my guests, for strange as it may seem to you I don't like Mr. St. Leger very much, and I don't think I shall be very sorry when he goes away."

Having packed all her papers securely under her arm Molly turned to go.

"Let me carry those," the Earl said, springing to his feet; "and look here, Molly, don't be in such an awful wax, as we used to say when I was a boy. I am downright sorry if I hurt you, and you know it."

Molly conceded her belongings to him grudgingly.

"I don't think you have ever been anything else but a boy," she remarked, shortly; "at all events, you don't make any attempt to try and get above boyish things, Philip."

She purposely avoided looking at him as she spoke, but she felt without seeing that this last shot had gone most surely home.

"I have known for a long time now that you have no good opinion of me," Lord Dunchester said, in a low and not quite clear voice, after a moment had passed, and they had left the stage and were walking down the long ball-room in the misty shadows of the twilight. "It is silly of me, I suppose, but I think there is nothing in the world I should so much like to possess as your good word, your good opinion, Molly."

Something like a tear rose almost once over Molly's brows eyes. In her heart there was a little pain, but she did not mean to yield to the weakness, not at least until a certain task she had long dreamed of performing should be carried out.

"Why don't you try to win it, Phil?" she asked, more gently. "It is your's most certainly, if you will only set about getting it."

The young man moved a little nearer to her trim, pretty figure.

"Can't you give me a little help, Molly?" he asked, pleadingly, and there was a boyish ring in his voice that went straight to her heart.

"Phil!" she said and she came to a sudden stop. "I will do all in the world to help you, but you must help yourself most. You say there is nothing you desire more than to have my good opinion. I will, in my turn, confess there are few things I desire more than to see

you not striving to win a good word from me, but to be true to the better and higher things there are within you. You have been a *dancer* long enough. Give up all this idleness, this rushing hither and thither after pleasure and excitement. Turn to some honest hard work. I don't care what you do, so long as it is straightforward and honourable. There must be so many things you can do. Just give your mind to this for a little while; and then see if you don't wake up one day to find yourself a better and a happier man altogether than you have been all these years that are gone."

She put out her hand, involuntarily, and the young man grasped it tightly.

"And, Molly, if I do all this—if I turn over a big new leaf, and start out to be of some use in the world, you will be kind to me? you will not forget your promise to think well of me? You will be my friend always, will you not?"

"My dear—"

Molly's face was hidden, but the tears that came to her eyes had found a place also in her voice. She was most deeply touched by his gentleness, by the submissive eagerness to please her that escaped him in every word he uttered.

"You know I am your friend, Philip. If I were not a friend, do you think I should have spoken as I have just done?"

"I know you are—"; and then Lord Dunchester came to a full stop.

Molly had drawn away her hand, and they were moving on out of the grey shadows into the warm, cosy light of the big hall.

The young man did not pursue the subject. There was a moment's silence between them, and then he changed the conversation by bringing up the name of Basil and his expected arrival.

"I shall go to the station and meet 'Bay,'" Molly said, as they stood for a moment by the wide, old-fashioned fire-place. "I am so eager to see him, Philip, and yet I am nervous, too."

"How is Mrs. Seaton?" Lord Dunchester inquired. "I have called several times, but, of course, I have never asked to see her. Lady Sartoris is rather inclined to be mysterious about her niece."

"Molly made an impatient movement.

"I get a little tired with Lady Sartoris. She does nothing but worry Justin about her senses. There is nothing at all mysterious about Justin: she is only very delicate, and the shock to her nerves has thrown her back the last week. She was looking so much better, too. I was delighted at the interest she took in the theatricals. Now, of course, all the good they did her is gone; but—there will come a better time for her, poor child, before long, please God. Can you try and imagine, Philip, how lovely Justin would look if she were happy?"

"She is very beautiful as she is; but, still, I know what you mean—she is never without a shadow on her face and in her eyes. By the way, Molly, have you seen anything of Miss Greatorex lately? I don't think she will get over the snub you gave her the other day in a hurry."

"It was not a snub," Molly said hurriedly. "I would not snub any one, unless it was a person like Mr. St. Leger, who wants keeping in his place. I only spoke out as I did to Leam because I felt she was cruel and unjust to one who has done nothing but win every one's love, respect, and pity. I hope Leam is not going to harbour unkind thoughts towards me: we have been friends too long to be parted so easily as this."

Molly spoke warmly, but, as she uttered these words, she had a slight feeling of uneasiness and pain in her heart. It had been impossible for Molly not to see the drift of Leam's thoughts where Basil was concerned; and, indeed, as we have learned already, there had been a time when Molly had tried to accustom herself to the picture of Leam as her brother's wife.

In the days before Justin had come into her life to be as dearly loved, almost, as Basil himself, Molly had very nearly assured herself that some day—she had not been, of course, sure when this day would come (for Basil, although he had a ways shown a liking for Miss Greatorex, was very obviously not in love with her, or in a great

hurry for matrimony), Leam would come and take her place at Croome Hall, and though she had had no keen pleasure or satisfaction in this thought, it had also not been disagreeable to her.

She knew all Leam's failings, but she recognized quickly the girl's superiority over the rest of the young women with whom Basil had been brought in contact.

The day, however, that was the beginning of her friendship with Justina Seaton brought no such calm prospect of her brother's future into Molly's mind. A new light had been flung upon Basil—he was revealed to her in a new, and almost a strange phase; in all the years they had been together Molly had never seen Basil in the guise he wore throughout those sad anxious days of Justina's illness.

He was, to her, another man to the calm, unemotional brother she had adored since first she could remember. All the conflicting fears and doubts that had troubled Molly when first the full truth of things touching Basil and Justina had come upon her; the pain and perplexity that had crowded her mind, the difficulty to see what was best to be done for Basil's sake, and for the poor, desolate young creature who was so dear to him—all the feelings that she had had before Justina had left Croome Hall and gone into her own little home, came back to Molly in this instant as her mind dwelt on Leam Greatorex and on the possible disappointment and unhappiness that might be dealt out to her in the realization of Basil's love-dream, that once had been so hopeless, but now was so full of hope.

"It is a hard thing, Philip," she said, slowly, breaking her long silence in a thoughtful way, "it is a hard thing that one person's happiness seems nearly always to be built on another person's pain!"

"You are thinking of Basil when you say that!" Lord Dunchester queried.

Molly nodded her head.

"And of Leam Greatorex!"

The young man gave a short exclamation.

"Now don't begin to let yourself be worried over Leam Greatorex. No doubt, if everything goes as we hope sincerely it will go, there will be some disappointment for Miss Greatorex, but as to real sorrow or pain—my dear Molly—remember we are talking of a stone—not a woman."

Molly did not agree with this.

"Leam is not a stone, far from it; he is very harshness and dislike to poor little Just, shows this clearly enough. She is not a soft woman nor a weak one, but she is not a stone; and I am afraid she can feel pain as much as any of us, Philip. Of course I don't know that she will, because, although I have had my own ideas about her feelings for Basil, I have really nothing to go upon except those ideas; and, perhaps, after all, I may be quite wrong about them. I only hope I am wrong, and that Leam may have had no other desire, or hope, or intention towards my brother than to be his friend. I confess it would make the situation altogether more pleasant to me if I could think this, because, whichever way things may go with Justina, whether she be a free woman, or one tied or bound for the rest of her life, Basil will never ask Leam Greatorex to become his wife; on that point I have no doubt whatsoever."

"Well, all I have to say on the matter is, that though I don't care as a rule to count on any man's death, I cannot help hoping with all my heart that the news Basil will bring us to-night will be such as to give happiness to him and to that brave, lonely little creature he loves. You know, Molly, I have a great, great admiration and affection for Basil. He is such a trick, he is an example to me of everything a man should be. I can never tell you half the love and gratitude I have for Basil. He is the best friend I have in the world—after you—and then he is your brother, Molly, and that alone makes him different and better than all the rest of the fellows. Now I am off. Give me your hand, Molly. Look here, I am not going to forget a single word of what you said to me. I am going to do better, 'pon my soul I am—I will make you proud of me yet. Very likely you won't see me for a long time when I make this start. I can't do anything for the immediate moment. I have all these people on

my hands, but in a day or two they will be gone, and then—well, then, Molly, I shall be off. You promise you won't forget me while I am away, don't you, dear? If I have the knowledge with me always that you are thinking about me you don't know what a help it will be. Though I am a man you see I can't do without some help, if it's only a thought that lives with me day and night it will help me and bring me back an altogether different chap to the one I have been so long. Good-night, now—I suppose you would rather go and meet Basil alone?"

"Yes, dear, I think I will go alone to-night."

Molly's eyes were downcast. She did not want him to see the tears shining in them, but as he was moving away she called him back in a voice that was tremulous and very unlike her usual firm clear one.

"Philip, you will forgive me if I have been unkind. I spoke roughly, perhaps, but—"

"You unkind!" the young man held her hand between both his own, then stooped his head and pressed his lips to it. "Don't you know I love you, Molly?" he said, in a very low voice. "You are the angel of my life!"

He went away abruptly, and Molly sank into one of the big easy chairs, and stared straight into the fire with eyes that were blinded by tears.

Yet, though there was pain in her heart there was great, great happiness, such delight as had never come to Molly before in all the days of her bright young life.

The love that had begun to blossom in her heart of hearts had had a sweetness even though it had come unasked and seemed doomed to live unclaimed or known; but sweet as this love had been there had never come to her, even in imagination, such a warmth of joy, such a thrill of delight as now ran riot in her heart at the recollection that the man she had grown to love so well loved her in return—loved her earnestly, truly, passionately, and desired only to make himself worthy in every sense of this love.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JUSTINA sat in a low-cushioned chair in front of the fire in her little drawing-room—she looked very wan and delicate.

Janet had come in now and then to try to induce her young mistress to break her long fast—once, indeed, she had brought in a small cup of delicious beef-tea, and putting it down close beside the girl she had gone softly away hoping her efforts would be this time rewarded with success.

Justina did, indeed, attempt to gratify the kind thought of the servant; but with her heart full of nervous excitement, with her brain sketching in vivid flashes a series of sad and painful pictures of that husband who had treated her so cruelly, and whose death had come upon him so suddenly, so unexpectedly.

Somehow she did not doubt but that Basil would bring fullest confirmation of this death. She had a curious sensation within her that seemed to tell her Rupert was dead. Her whole thought now was as to the life and the circumstances that had been about him when this death came, and there was a yearning hope within her that before he passed away from the life he had wasted and misused so terribly there might have been some gleam of a higher, a better, a purer nature than that cruel, cynical, cunning one she had known so well.

She grieved over the man's death on this account, and she sent many a thought of wistful sympathy to the mother in Australia, who she knew had adored her eldest boy with more passion and tenderness than with wisdom.

It was only natural, too, that to a spirit so gentle, so sensitive, so intensely human as Justina's, she should pass through moments of acute mental suffering, she should fall under the shadow of her own unreasonable and unjust self-reproach—a reproach that though her wiser self could not fail to set aside as wrong and even foolish, yet in her weaker more troubled moments had the power to sting and hurt exceedingly.

A message had come from Molly earlier in the

evening telling her Basil was expected in a few hours.

The clock on the mantelshelf ticked away industriously. It was now over half-past eight, in a few moments her week of uncertainty would be ended, she would know all.

Even as this thought came there was the sound of carriage-wheels on the road beyond, then the clang of the little gate, then quick hurrying feet, then the sharp ring at the bell that always proclaimed Molly's arrival.

Justina rose and stood with one hand leaning on her chair for support. She had never looked more lovely in Molly's eyes as she did on this night. Her whole face pale with emotion and full of the questions she dared not speak.

Molly went straight up to her and took her in her arms.

"Dear, dear Justina!" she said, most tenderly.

And Justina understood, by the fact of Basil's absence, by the tone of Molly's voice, she knew instantly that all that Mrs. Baines had told that day of a week before was proved to be true—to be absolutely correct.

The two girls stood clinging to one another in silence for a moment or two. It was Justina who spoke first.

"Tell me all, Molly dear," she said, her voice scarcely audible from the rush of agitated memories of emotions that thrilled her.

Molly put her back into her chair with all the care and loving tenderness of a mother.

"There is not very, very much to tell, darling. Basil could have returned several days ago, but he waited to be absolutely sure on every point before he left Paris—"

Molly paused, and then produced a small packet from her coat.

"These are some things belonging to your husband, Basil thought you might care to have them. He found, Justina, dearest, that Mr. Seaton had met with an accident a day or so before his death, that inflammation and fever set in most violently on the result of this accident, and that, notwithstanding all care and medical attention, the fever ended fatally before it had lasted more than twenty-four hours. Basil saw the doctor and the nurse who attended Mr. Seaton, and he has brought a written statement from them both, giving you full particulars. He also visited the grave, and in your name he carried some flowers to lay upon it. I do not think there is anything he has not done to investigate the matter most thoroughly and bring you a true report of all that happened, so far, at least, as it was possible for him to do so. He has begged me to give you all the sympathy and comfort in my power, darling, and to help you to bear so sad and trying an event with all that courage and noble spirit that has sustained you for so long."

Justina did not speak at once, she only bent forward and kissed Molly's brow. Her hands were clasped round the packet she had just received.

"Molly," she asked, when she could find her voice—"Molly, does—does Basil know all about Rupert? I mean, did he learn what sort of life he had been living, what his companions were? Oh! Molly, I cannot pretend to have a deep, an awful grief for this man's death. He destroyed all the claims he had upon my respect and faith long, long ago. He used me very ill, and he left me to starve or die in a cruel and peculiarly horrible way; still Molly, he was the man I married. I cannot be utterly callous to what concerned him, and it would be a great comfort, a great relief to me if I could know that though his life had been so wrong, his end had been quite different. You understand this, do you not, dear Molly? I am sure you understand what I feel."

"I do, indeed, darling," Molly answered, eagerly; "and to my happiness it is in my power to give you this comfort. The nurse and doctor both told Basil, and you will see it in their statements, that though the poor creature's illness had come upon him when his life was neither a good nor a desirable one, his mind, towards the last, awoke out of the stupor and delirium of the fever, and he died fully knowing the solemn journey that lay before him, and praying with



LORD DUNCHESTER SAT DOWN UPON THE MUSIC-STOOL, CRUSHED, AT MOLLY'S RETORT.

his feeble lips for mercy and forgiveness for all the sins he had committed." Molly paused a moment and her hand stole towards Justina's. "I do not think he spoke your name, darling," she said, with rarest gentleness, "but he seems to have remembered his mother and to have cried to her many times."

"Ah! I am glad of that—I am glad," Justina said, her face lighting up even beneath her tears. "I do not mind that he forgot me; I never loved him as his mother did. I should not have cared to have come before his mother or his God!"

Her voice broke into a passionate flood of tears. She had not shed one all during the past week, but now they came rushing wildly from her over-charged heart and easing the tension of the distraught nerves and aching brain. Molly knelt holding the weeping girl in her arms; she was distressed at the tears but not alarmed. She knew this storm of emotion would do good, not ill, and she allowed it to spend itself, unchecked by her.

An hour or so later Molly stole away from Justina's bed. She had insisted on Janet and herself carrying the poor, tired, slender form upstairs, and once in the dainty little bed Molly had doctored and ministered to Justina with a love and eager care passing words.

Not until at last she saw that the dark, fringed eyes were really closed in the much-needed sleep, did Molly think of returning to her home. She crept softly downstairs, and, after giving many injunctions to Janet, and promising to return early the next morning, she went out into the night air and down to the gate where the carriage was still standing, with Basil walking restlessly up and down awaiting her return. Molly slipped her arm through his.

"She is sleeping. She will be better to-morrow!" she said, and then she led him into the brougham, and as they drove swiftly back to the Hall she told him all that had just occurred.

And while Molly was thus engaged a man sat

alone in the smoking-room at the Hut. St. Leger was not smoking, he was busy writing. From the frown on his face it was evident he was deeply interested in some mental subject, and that this subject was by no means an agreeable one.

"Curse the fellow," he said once savagely, to himself, his usual good-humoured face puckered into a hundred lines. "What the—does he mean? Why doesn't he write, and what does this infernal Brissac intend me to understand? I have never had any trust in Seaton; but in this case it was so obviously for his own good that I thought he would be sure to stick to the business."

He took up a letter, written on thin paper in a flourishing foreign hand. The contents were in French, and dealt entirely with some mysterious business for which St. Leger had apparently issued commands. The paragraph which caused him such uneasiness came at the end of the letter. We will translate it from French to English.

"Seaton promised to come in the night before last; but nothing was seen of him, neither has he sent a word to me in explanation. He has been making an extra fool of himself the last few days over a girl at the Hippodrome, and I think she is the cause of his disappearance. Anyhow, up to the present, no one seems to know anything about him. He will turn up all right in an hour or so, and perhaps, on the whole, considering what he is, under the circumstances it is the best thing that could have happened. This Englishman is going into the whole business most thoroughly, but we have been too clever for him—he will leave to-morrow thoroughly convinced that poor Arthur Leslie, whom we buried a little while ago, is indeed no other than Rupert Seaton, the husband of la belle Anglaise whom you tell me he loves. I will let you know at once when Seaton comes, and you must forward all your wishes without delay."

St. Leger read this paragraph through and through, and each time his brow grew darker.

"Curse him and his blunder-headed conceit; he shall answer to me for this; fool that I am to trust him—any woman who takes his fancy for the moment can upset all my plans." He threw the letter down and remained plunged in thought for a time, then his brow cleared.

"After all Brissac is right, it has been a good thing Seaton did this little disappearance on his own account. Basil Fothergill has gone so thoroughly into everything he might have run against Seaton in some one or other of his investigations; the fellow will have turned up by now, and after all, if he remains away a little longer it won't matter much. We cannot begin to gather our fruit just yet. We must give them a little time. They will not be of much use till they are married, and that can't come off for the next month or two at least. Rupert Seaton had better make the most of his independence and freedom, for when we begin work in serious earnest I shall keep a tight hand upon him, that is very certain; he can play tricks with his own safety, but he shan't play tricks with me!"

And having arrived at this conclusion, Mr. St. Leger returned to his correspondence in a more tranquil frame of mind.

(To be continued.)

It is the rule in Austria and Germany that all the members of the Imperial family, boys and girls, shall learn a trade. On account of this the Queen of Spain was enabled to do a little unpremeditated act of cleverness which greatly added to her popularity with working people. Visiting the famous factory of mosaics at Orto, she stopped to watch one of the workmen for a few moments and then asked him to let her finish his job. Then taking his seat she completed in the most deft and workmanlike manner the mosaic he had commenced, according to the methods she learned when a little archduchess, with no idea of becoming a queen.

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"WOMAN, WHO ARE YOU—WHAT DO YOU WANT?" SAID SIR PHILIP, SAVAGELY.

EVANGELINE'S LEGACY.

—:—: CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHANGE—AND CLOUDS AHEAD.

SITTING by the Herncastles' fireside, in the dining-room at the Lower Mills, with Mark and Helen for indignant and sympathetic audience, this which fellows was substantially the story that Lina Ferris had come over to tell them.

She told it rapidly in her own words, which were few and passionate, and in her own way; the actual facts of the case in detail having, however, happened in this wise:

About five o'clock on the afternoon of that day Mrs. Hubble, flushed and pompous, had sailed into the school-room—where Lina and her wee charges were occupied with their tea, and talking at the same time of fairies good and bad, hobgoblins, gnomes, and the like, as described so delightfully in their adored Grimm—with an open telegram in her hand.

"Miss Ferris, I have just heard from my daughter, Mrs. Andrews," announced Mrs. Hubble without preamble, tapping with the gold-rimmed glasses which she occasionally wore on her elaborate watch chain the bit of pink paper in her hand. "Her and Mr. Andrews are coming down to-morrow. They will stay a few days with us here, and when they leave for London they will take my grandchildren with them. So I came to say that we shan't require your services no longer, Miss Ferris. Joey and Tommy, my pets," said Mrs. Hubble, turning abruptly, and with marked insolence, her broad back upon the governess, and stooping with an uncommon display of affection between the two little ones—"dear pap-pa and mam-ma are coming to-morrow. Aren't you glad, my duckies?"

She called them her "duckies" that evening, because, like Amelia and Sophy, Mrs. Hubble herself had grown heartily sick of the children and the responsibility the care of them entailed;

and so waxed loving at the prospect of their departure.

"I don't know," said Joey, hanging her flaxen head shyly.

"I don't know," said Tommy, also with little blonde head drooping over a slice of bread-and-jam. And then they stared up sadly and wonderingly at their stout grandmother, who glittered all over with golden ornaments like some strange Hindoo god; for they hardly as yet comprehended the full significance of what they had just heard.

Lina had pushed back her chair from the table, and had risen to do battle with the enemy; for she perceived that it was imminent.

"I am to understand, then, Mrs. Hubble," she said, controlling her voice as evenly as she was able, "that it is your wish that I should leave this—"

"Exactly; just as soon as ever you please, madam," replied Mrs. Hubble, straightening her fat figure with what she flattered herself was a most dignified mien, and now facing the young governess with all the pent up hatred and jealous spite of the past few months flaming in her face.

"Of course you will receive a quarter's salary in lieu of a quarter's notice, like any other of our servants might do placed in similar circumstances; we always likes to be just; together with whatever may be owing, which I know isn't much—"

"I do not want your money; I will not touch a penny of it," said Lina haughtily, every vein in her slender body thrilling with indignation, her beautiful face now flushing, now paling, with an emotion born of anger and disgust combined. "How dare you so speak to me, so insult me, Mrs. Hubble!"

"Dare! Insult! Bless my soul alive," cried Mrs. Hubble, purple with rage, "what next, I wonder! How dare you, a—a—a trumpery governess, speak to me in this fashion; that's what I should like to know—you impertinent hussy, you! I never in all my born days, no, that I never did—"

"I leave your house immediately, Mrs. Hubble"

quietly interrupted Lina, holding up her hand. "You have said enough—more than enough."

"Leave my 'ouse? Ay, that you do, I'll warrant! I'll take precious good care of that! And—and what's more, if you don't pretty soon clear out of your own accord, my lady, I'll have you chucked out, neck and crop, see if I don't," screamed Mrs. Hubble, whom Lina's self-possession and quiet contempt, overtly expressed as was the latter in look and demeanour alike, only served every instant to exasperate the more; "for we have had quite sufficient of your hairs and graces, I can tell you—"

Here the two little girls, frightened at their grandmother's violent tones, at the sudden change in her altogether, began to cry in unison. So Mrs. Hubble pounced upon them both at once, shook them roughly out of their high cane chairs, and then, having gripped each by a little bare tender arm, in a trice had jerked and twisted them out of the room. Terrified out of their infant wits, they fled to Lina's bed-room, where they remained in hiding, drying their tears in their pinafores, until Miss Ferris herself by-and-by came up and discovered and comforted them there.

Having banged the school-room door, and thus excluded the little ones and their sobs, Mrs. Hubble stalked back to confront again the governess; not having, in her—Mrs. Hubble's—phraseology, "done with her yet."

"Yes, your superior hairs and graces, I say, and your goings-on generally," said she, panting out the words at the top of her coarse voice. "We've had enough of them, or rather too much of 'em, all along. From the day when you first set foot in this house, you've never known your place, I say—"

Lina slightly inclined her head, a finely ironical smile just curving her delicate lips.

"If I have not," she said, "surely it is no wonder."

The sarcasm of the remark was lost on Mrs. Hubble, who once having given the rein to her tongue had no intention now of stopping to choose

her words. She had flung off like a new but ill-fitting garment her company and would-be fine lady manners; and with that complete off-flinging as it were Mrs. Hubble became herself.

Having politely pronounced the governess "an impertinent hussy," was it likely that she would hesitate over any other choice epithet which might haply just then occur to her mind?

"Ah, you may sneer, you odious baggage," she stormed; "but let me tell you this: you don't know who you are speaking to—"

"It may not be improbable, Mrs. Hubble, that you and your family are equally ignorant, may be similarly situated, with regard to myself," threw in Lina proudly, unable in the heat of the moment to resist the temptation to make a retort of the kind.

"Don't interrupt me, you stuck-up pert thing," cried Mrs. Hubble, struggling for breath. "Me and my family; indeed! I don't believe you are a fit associate for anybody's family. You ought to have been sent to the right about long ago. That's my opinion of you, and now you've got it!"

"When you have finished, Mrs. Hubble, I should like to get my things together—to pack my trunks."

"Pack your trunks? Ay, that you shall, my lady, an' welcome, when I've done with you. And in double-quick time—I'll see about that."

"Pray go on."

"I tell you that you don't know who you are speaking to," shrieked the stout and choleric wife of the wealthy Reuben Hubble. "I shall be mother-in-law to a baronette very soon—a real five baronite! My daughter, Miss Sophia Hubble, will have you to know, madam, is going to marry Sir Philip Wroughton of Mossport Priory; and then she'll be Lady Wroughton; and I shall be mother-in-law to a real—"

Lina was taken a-back; perceptibly so. She started, the colour leaped to her cheeks; then, as quickly fading out of them, left her marble-white. She leaned heavily with one hand upon the school-room table, and almost overturned her cup of cold tea.

"Impossible!" came the faint interjection. "It is impossible, Mrs. Hubble!"

"Impossible?" echoed Mrs. Hubble, at the highest pitch of her voice. "How dare you say so! What, pray, do you know about it? Who are you that you should presume to question the truth of anything that I may be pleased to tell you concerning the private arrangements of our family?" cried Mrs. Hubble, waxing somewhat obscure in her desire to be crushing and impressive. "I tell you my daughter Sophia will shortly be Lady Wroughton—"

"I do not believe it," exclaimed Lina passionately.

"You ill-bred creature! You insolent thing!" screamed Mrs. Hubble, who looked as if—had she not been on the verge of choking—she would have flown at Lina with the intent and fury of a wild cat. "Out of my house you march this instant, and never no more do you—"

"I am going," said Lina, retaining her composure by a struggle which cost her positive pain. She felt dizzy with a rush of mingled sensations. For a moment she turned faint, and thought she would have fallen. But she managed to walk composedly towards the door, her head erect, her hand outstretched to grasp the lock.

But ere she could touch it the door flew back, and into the school-room bounced Amelia, followed more leisurely by her sister Sophy—the future Lady Wroughton.

"A fine uproar you're making in here," said Miss Hubble roughly. "What's it all about, ma?" staring from her mother to the governess in wide-eyed astonishment at the evident aspect of affairs.

"We thought somebody was murdering somebody," said Sophy, shrugging her shoulders. "It was worse than pig-sticking. Why, ma, they must have heard you at Mossport."

"I don't care if they heard me at Marley," returned Mrs. Hubble. Then a reaction of feeling overtaking her, she broke forth into a passion of sobs and tears. "I never was so insulted in my life," she said, plumping herself down upon a slippery old horse-hair sofa which stood near the

school-room window—"never!" wept Mrs. Hubble emphatically.

"Well, I can't say that it sounds altogether decent, whether one's insulted or not," remarked Sophy languidly, "to scream out, ma, at the top of one's lungs as if one was shouting for a wager, don't you know? Miss Ferris, perhaps you will be good enough to enlighten us, to explain the meaning of this extraordinary—"

Thus Sophy was continuing; when, turning, she perceived that Lina was gone.

Miss Ferris went straightway to her room; found the scared little girls huddled together there; comforted them in her own endearing fashion, and assured them that, although she was going away, she would see them both again some day.

Then like one in a dream, though her movements were quick and determined, she set to work to gather her belongings together. An hour later she was at Mark Hernecastle's mill-door, representing her agitation and reminding him of his promise to assist her in her hour of need. That hour had now overtaken her, Lina told the Hernecastles, and she was thankful beyond words for their help and their friendship.

When she had finished her story, Helen said indignantly—

"I have no patience with the Hubbles, and I cannot tell you, Lina, dear, how I rejoice that you have done with them. It will be simply delightful to have you here, and I shall be in no hurry to let you go, I can tell you."

Lina smiled uneasily. She was still very pale, and shivered now and then, in spite of the wine which, as she sat there by the fireside, Helen and Mark had insisted upon her drinking soon after her arrival at the Lower Mills.

"I—I think I must to-morrow find apartments somewhere in Marley," she began, "until—until my arrangements are completed, and I know what I am going to do—"

Helen Hernecastle interrupted their visitor. She went to Lina's side and put her hand upon her shoulder.

"You will pain us if you talk in that strain," said Mark's sister; while Mark himself looked up quickly from a fixed contemplation of the cheery fire.

"What is that you are saying?" he struck in, brusquely—"apartments in Marley, Miss Ferris? For Heaven's sake, don't let us hear any more of such a mad suggestion so long as a roof remains above our heads at the Lower Mills!"

"You hear," said Helen, smiling; "and you mustn't say it again. Mark can be very angry when he pleases, believe me."

Lina, too, then rose and stood by Helen, pressing her hands wearily over her dark and feverish eyes.

"I cannot thank you to-night," she said. "I must think—my brain is in a whirl. I cannot thank you yet—"

"You had better not—in fact, don't try," was Helen's brisk reply. "My dear Lina, tell us this, however. Why did you rouse the ire of our worthy friend Mrs. Hubble, by so flatly disbelieving her statement about Sophy's projected marriage? You know, it is perfectly true; Mark himself says so; the news to-day is in everyone's mouth in Redminster."

Lina's small white hands were twitching nervously; the delicate face wore an expression of acute distress.

"The announcement you see, was so—so unexpected," she said, faintly. "It was—it was, I suppose, about the last thing in the world that I thought to hear just then. I did not think it possible that it could be true. I was taken unawares. To me—I—I cannot explain why—it seemed so strange; so—altogether unnatural," said Lina, almost piteously.

"Ah, Miss Ferris, we shall hear more of the affair before we are many days older. Things—motives—will come out as clear as day-light by-and-by, you'll see," said Mark, knitting his brows.

With an effort Lina collected her wandering wits.

"I must write a note to my brother in London," she said hastily—"merely a few lines.

Can it by any possibility be despatched to-night?"

Mark at once pulled out his watch, and Helen lost no time in placing all requisite writing materials upon her davenport, which stood in the room.

"It is now twenty minutes to eight," said Hernecastle. "The last post goes out at Marley at 8.15. Write your letter, Miss Ferris, and one of the men shall ride directly with it into the town. My own have already gone."

She murmured her earnest thanks to Mark, and seated herself at his sister's davenport; Helen herself going off to give instructions to Martha about preparing the best bedroom for Lina's accommodation.

Hernecastle stood upon the hearth, his back to the fire, watching Lina wistfully as she wrote her hurried letter.

In a little while it was written, folded, stamped, and ready, bearing the familiar address: "Philip Ferris, Esq., 10, Portugal-square, London, W."

Five minutes afterwards Lina's letter was speeding on its way to the Marley post-office, Mark telling the man not to spare the horse.

Helen, meanwhile, had reappraised her conference with Martha, concluded satisfactorily—to find that their guest, once more checked and hooded, was evidently about to quit the house.

"My dear," she exclaimed, staring in surprise at her friend, "where in the world are you going?"

Lina answered that she must return for a short time to the Hubbles—she did not think she would be absent long; but she wished to tell them where she was, whither to send her trunks, and moreover, she recollected there were still at the Hubbles' house a few of her possessions which she had omitted to pack up with the rest of her things. She would soon come back, she said feverishly; but indeed she must go.

"But we can easily send across and tell them where to bring your things," urged Helen, with her usual practical view of a case. "There is surely no occasion for you to go back to that house to-night and to meet again that angry woman! Better still, dear, let Davy Crockett or somebody go over immediately, and wait for them and bring them home here. Stay, I will myself write a note to Mrs. Hubble. That will be best."

Lina, notwithstanding, was firm in her resolve to go herself; the worst of the Hubble storm, she said, was doubtless overpast; and she felt that she did not now care for fifty Mrs. Hubbles—with a wan attempt at a smile.

She kissed Helen in nervous haste, and got away whilst that young woman was still holding forth volubly upon the folly of returning for so trifling an object; or, since Lina was bent upon again showing herself in the dragon's cave, why could she not wait until Mark came in, so that he might accompany her thither, and also protect her when there?

But Helen was wasting her breath. And when Mark did come in, he discovered, to his amazement and vexation, that Lina Ferris was flown.

They waited for her a long half-hour, yet she came not. At the half-hour's expiration, however, arrived a groom from Marley Mills, bringing with him Lina's belongings from that house upon the other side of the water.

But no Lina followed the trunks. Armingier looked in; close on nine o'clock Guy Armingier looked in; his coat-collar turned up round his ears; a favourite meerschaum between his lips.

The rough night-wind had blown a brilliant colour into the young fellow's handsome face; his joyous blue eyes sparkled, as though with lurking merriment in the lamplight; rain-drops glistened in the waves of his blond hair.

Helen's true heart leaped, as it ever did, at the sight of Guy's beauty; but Helen Hernecastle was a woman who could be mistress of herself in the presence of the man she loved, and her firm white hand was perfectly cool and steady when it rested within Armingier's close, lingering clasp.

She was a woman in a thousand, true, sweet, and forgiving, he used to think tenderly in those dear days—how dear, indeed, they seemed, in looking back to them in the after years!

"Ah, if he could only see his way—if someone would only die and leave him a fortune—if—if—a hundred 'ifs,'—futile as they were numberless, when he might have been up and doing and carving out for himself a way to the winning of all that he coveted!"

"Why not? Heaven had given him health and strength, rare beauty, talents of no mean order; a love, too, of the beautiful things in life, with keenest powers for the enjoyment thereof."

"And yet, somehow, with all these gifts in his favour, weakest and most visionary of weak and visionary mortals was Guy Arming."

"Poor, handsome, happy-go-lucky Guy! What would he do with his life?"

"The young man, of course, was full of the news of the hour."

"Why, it's plain to the blindest," said he gaily, "how the land lies."

"Humph, I should think so, indeed!" said Mark gruffly.

"For my part, I agree with Martha, who just now called the affair disgraceful," observed Helen. "I wonder what Sophy Hubble herself will have to say about it?"

"Oh, much about the same that any other worldly-minded young woman in similar circumstances would say," Guy said, flippantly. "And he filled his pipe from Mark's brown jar, and helped himself to the whiskey which Mark had placed upon the table."

"Sir Philip, however," continued Arming, as he set down the water-pitcher, "has breathed no word to me upon the subject; and I don't suppose that he will until he feels inclined to be communicative—which isn't often, as you are aware. At dinner this evening he never once opened his lips. He is a lively companion, I assure you!"

"Then Guy announced his intention of strolling up to 'The Bear,' to look at the evening papers and to see one or two fellows who were to meet him there. Was Mark coming too?"

No, said Mark emphatically, he was not; it was already nine o'clock, and too late. Why could not Arming content himself at the Lower Mills, instead of gadding off to Marley where he was safe to get into mischief? But Guy laughed, and said "the fellows" expected him—he couldn't disappoint them; and if Mark really would not accompany him, why, he must go alone. So gaily enough he took his leave; and Helen, when he was gone, sat down with an involuntary sigh, and began mechanically to turn over—though her eyes saw but dimly the objects beneath them—the contents of her housewifely work-basket.

"Hercastle accompanied his friend to the gate; and under cover of the blustering darkness, in which the sullen splash of the river made itself heard like some deep and melancholy human voice, he mentioned the fact of Miss Ferris being now their guest; she having quarrelled with the Hubbles and for ever severed her connection with that family."

"Though she is over there at this moment," said Mark, nodding across the gloomy river in the direction of the Hubbles' abode, "we expect her back here every second. Helen is waiting for her now."

Guy Arming immediately gave vent to a low whistle.

"Then the plot thickens still farther, old fellow!" exclaimed he, in his impulsive fashion.

"What do you mean?" Hercastle inquired, sharply.

"Well—well, you see," replied Guy, already repenting, after the manner of the man, of having given utterance to speech which he had vowed to himself before entering the Hercastles' house that nothing on earth should induce him to give utterance to—"you put up so deuced rough, Mark, the last time—I mentioned it, to tell you the truth I meant this time to keep my own counsel. But as usual," laughed Arming, "I haven't been able to do it, you see."

"Speak out, man, can't you?" Mark said.

Guy knew that he was "in for it;" that he must speak out now. And so as it was too late to draw back, he said accordingly—

"Dear old fellow, you are wrong! Miss Ferris is not at this moment at Marley Mills—I can

swear to it. She is at Moss-court Priory. I saw her hurrying through the grounds there to-night just as certainly and unmistakably as I saw her on that other night I told you about. I'm not drunk, Mark; you can believe me or not, as you please. Good-night!"

"Here, Guy—one word——"

"No, you don't, old chap; I'm off. Ta-ta!" Before Hercastle could say more, he had waved his stick in adieu; and the next moment Arming had disappeared. Now that there were no floods out to hinder him, Guy took the shorter road, the meadow-path by the windy riverside, to Marley; and Mark Hercastle, lost for a few minutes in moodiest reflection, stood leaning there bare-headed over the garden-gate alone.

Where was she? Never at Moss-court Priory—at that hour, and alone—never!

Well, this time he would find out the truth for himself. He would straightway seek Lina, wherever she was, and bring her home!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MUTTERING OF THE STORM.

MARK presently went back to Helen. His mind was made up. But he said not a word to his sister of what Guy Arming had told him. What he did say, was—

"I shall just go over to the Hubbles' and see if Lina is ready. I'm sure she can't want to stop there now."

"Yes, Mark, do; and supper shall be on the table by the time you get back," replied Helen, glancing anxiously at the clock on the mantel piece. "I wonder," she added, "what is keeping Lina? She had nothing to stay for as far as I could understand."

"Well, I'll go and find out at any rate," said Mark; and forthwith he took up his hat and started off on his errand.

He passed through a shrubbery by the water-side and made his way round to what was known in the Hubble household as the river-door; which was a door opening on a sheltered part of their spacious grounds that was here touched by the river itself.

In answer to Mark's knock a spruce parlour maid speedily showed herself; but she stared at him when he asked for Miss Ferris.

"She has been here, has she not—Miss Ferris I'm asking about. Don't you understand?" said Hercastle, impatiently.

"Oh yes, sir, I understand," answered the damsel. "And Miss Ferris was here, I know. But she stayed barely a minute, I should say, for I let her in and I let her out. It's quite an hour ago since she left, sir."

Great Heaven! thought Hercastle—the conviction that it was so thrusting itself upon him—could it be possible that Guy, after all, was right? No, no, he decided the next minute; what should Lina want at Moss-court Priory, with Sir Philip Wroughton at that hour of night?

She must be sitting with her old friend, Jasper Brooke, at the Lock cottage. He—Mark—would look in there, going back, and see whether Lina was where he imagined.

"Thank you," he said to the servant; and was turning from the step of the river-door when Mrs. Hubble herself, crossing the stone passage, heard and recognised the young man's voice.

"Oh, that's you, Mark Hercastle, is it?" cried she, sailing up and sending the maid about her business. In Mrs. Hubble's manner, in her bearing altogether, there were indications plainly yet remaining of her late hostile encounter with Miss Ferris. She had just been upstairs and well slapped and shaken her little grand daughters, each in her little white cot, for "crying themselves to sleep," as their grandmother put it, for the loss of Lina. "What, ain't you coming in then," said Mrs. Hubble, "just for a minute, to—to—to—congratulate our Sophy?"

She was indeed desirous to get Mark into the house; for the worthy woman was precisely in the humour to give him "a bit of her mind."

"I am much obliged," said Mark drily; but my congratulations can wait, Mrs. Hubble, until

I have more leisure to see your daughter Sophy. I merely called to ascertain whether Miss Ferris was here; but since she is not, I suppose I shall find her at the Lock cottage. We are expecting her at the Lower Mills, as of course you are aware. She is going, I hope, to be our guest for some time."

"Yes, I am aware," exclaimed Mrs. Hubble, wrathfully; "and very ill we take it, Mark, of you and Helen, old friends and neighbours as we are, siding with that jade against us! I may just as well tell you, now that you have come over," added Mrs. Hubble, "that so long as that stuck-up, insolent baggage remains with you at the Lower Mills, neither me nor the girls nor their pa——"

"Good-night, Mrs. Hubble," said Mark, cutting her short. "For the future, please recollect that Miss Ferris is our friend; and I am not going to hear her abused either by you or by anybody else."

He turned abruptly and strode off; and Mrs. Hubble, thus cheated of her intent, slammed the river-door upon Hercastle's retreating form, and drew the bolts and rattled the key in the lock with as much noise and ado as if she had been bolting out Miss Ferris herself.

When Mark again passed the lock-keeper's cottage, he stole cautiously toward an uncurtained lattice, through which a light shone out upon the outer gloom, and peered in.

Every corner of the small white-washed room was distinctly visible. At a glance Hercastle perceived that Lina was not there.

Jasper Brooke was alone.

The old man was sitting at a small round table, a lamp and an open Bible before him. He always read a chapter in that book before he went up to his bed. It had happened that many a barge had passed through the lock gates during the day; and Jasper was very tired. His gray head leaned upon his hand as he read.

"Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord!"

"It is hard," old Jasper muttered, dropping his hand heavily upon the open page, "that vengeance should be forbidden to man. And yet—and yet if after all these long and weary years, I should ever be permitted to learn the truth, should ever come across him, ah!"—with a slow upward gaze—"then may the Lord have mercy on me. Mercy I should want from God and man too!"

Mark saw the old man's lips move, and thought that they moved in prayer. Quietly he stepped from the window, crossed the lock, and regained the wooden bridge. His step was firm, his mouth had an iron look, his eyes were troubled beneath their contracted brows. He turned his back upon that portion of the bridge which led to his own home, and took that part of it which spanned the weir and terminated upon the river bank in the low-lying meadows of Moss-court.

Here upon a blasted pollard-stump Mark seated himself, determined to wait, if need were, until daybreak. That extraordinary assertion which Guy Arming had now made for the second time should that night be proved either true or false.

If Lina Ferris were, as Guy had declared he had seen her, at Moss-court Priory, she must pass on her return to the Lower Mills the decayed old pollard-stump upon which Mark sat. So there he would wait and see what happened. He would get at the truth, if possible.

He pulled up his coat-collar, and managed to light his pipe. The heavy cloud-canopy had parted, and now in weird and menacing fragments went hurrying over the sky. The fitful rain-drops had ceased to splash down; a watery white moon peeped forth now and then. The roar of the restless mills smote the night air, with the sad, sullen sobbing of the river and the sound of the silvery weir.

The tall rushes whispered everlastingly in the wind, and shrank and bowed themselves to the very water's edge. A moorhen, disturbed from a bed of reeds hard by where Hercastle sat waiting, rose up and flew screeching to a pool farther on; her harsh, scared voice died away; an owl began to hoot in the woods.

But Mark's sense of hearing had as yet caught

no sound of footsteps along the meadow path which led from the grounds of Moss-court Priory. Yet that that sound would surely come by-and-by Mark Hencastle knew well enough.

Yes; though he had within the past half hour told himself a hundred times that Guy must be wrong, sorely against the force of his own inclination he was somehow convinced that Arminger was right.

Still, what could Lina Ferris want at the house of Sir Philip Wroughton?

Sir Philip Wroughton sat alone in the library at Moss-court Priory.

That room, which was upon the southern side of the house, and the dining-room, were about the only two apartments downstairs that the master ever entered in these days. The decaying old mansion, with its numerous unoccupied chambers, was as silent as a cenotaph; though surely many a ghost, gaunt and grisly, stalked up and down those broad empty corridors and in and out those lofty desolate rooms!

At least, shipshod old Mrs. James the house-keeper—who used to creep about in the performance of her duties taking snuff whenever she felt disposed to, and whose scanty staff of underlings robbed her unblushingly and left her none the wiser—always affirmed that there were "ghosts" at Moss-court Priory.

Not that Mrs. James herself had ever seen one there; only she felt that the place was "haunted-like," she said. But then Mrs. James was addicted to gin-and-water, as well as to snuff, and liked her liquor brewed very hot, very sweet, and not at all very weak; and it was after she had been indulging in a tumblerful or so of her favourite stimulant that Mrs. James would aver that Moss-court Priory was haunted.

She had lived in the service of the late Sir Conrad and his dame, and never hesitated, in speaking of the Priory family to Mr. Badger the butler, to call the Wroughtons "a bad lot."

"Ah, Mr. Badger," she would say tearfully, after her third jorum, "Sir Conrad he were a bad 'un, if you like; and so was her ladyship, for the matter o' that. There, Badger, I could tell you things as 'ud lift up the 'air o' your 'ead—I could, Badger, though perhaps I'd better not. But it war'n't her fault, maybe, so much as his'n. And Sir Philip here, he's another bad 'un, if ever there was one—an out-an'-outer and no mistake, who'd stick at nothing to gain his ends."

And Mr. Badger, who was a very mild and ordinary sort of person, and who, by the way, had no hair upon his head to be lifted by tales of horror, thought to himself what an ungrateful old creature Mrs. James was to speak of the family in that disrespectful fashion, after getting her bread out of 'em for so many years.

Sir Philip, as he sat in his library on that night of Lina's mysterious absence, looked pale and harassed—unusually so. He had dined, and had letters to write; but he felt in no mood for the task. The light from the shaded lamps fell fantastically about him; upon his close-cropped gray head, upon his short black beard and blacker brows, and revealed distinctly the lines of care which furrowed his dead-white forehead.

The *Times* for that day and other papers yet uncut lay upon the table near at hand; a silver coffee-pot and an empty cup stood upon a salver at his elbow. A quaintly-fashioned liqueur-frame of solid old silver was also amongst the litter upon the table.

Sir Philip, however, touched none of these things; he sat there silent and abstracted, lost in a world of hateful memories, and was in truth as wretched and as sick at heart as he looked.

He had scarcely the air of a happy lover.

At dinner a note had been brought to him from Reuben Hubble, saying they should expect him that evening at Marley Mills—an unpleasant note smacking of vulgarity and worded more like a command than a polite invitation. In reply, nevertheless, Wroughton had sent a brief refusal to the effect that he was feeling far from well, but would call on the following day.

He was sick to death of the Hubbles, and of the dreary solitude of the Priory. He was out of tune, as it were, with himself and the whole world. If he could have done it, he would that

very night have packed a portmanteau and gone off to Paris, to Baden, or to Vienna. But the blessed road to freedom was blocked with barriers, with tremendous obstacles, that were not to be overcome.

He was horribly pinched for money, clogged with debt; he could not apply, as he had so often done in the past, for assistance to Reuben Hubble, in order that he might run away from Reuben Hubble's daughter, whom he now stood pledged to marry as early as they should please to arrange the business.

What a gruesome record of waste and wickedness had his whole career been! What a bare and barren life! And now, hedged around with a grim army of sordid cares and difficulties from which it appeared there was but one mode of escape, at last it had come to this! And in solitarily reviewing his present state, it seemed to Philip Wroughton that his downfall and ruin were complete.

Middle-age was past; old age was looming ahead; and his downfall and ruin were complete! Oh, for the past, for the wild freshness of morning back again once more, with all the bright possibilities of youth and manhood, that he might live his life over again and order that life anew! Oh, vain regret!

The hangings which draped the library window—which, like the library window of his lonely old Midlands Grange, opened to the terrace flags, and upon the upper panes of which, in coloured glass, were wrought the family crest and motto: the three doves and the bloody hand, with *Je fais mourir* encircling, here too at Moss-court Priory, the strange device—were only partly drawn, and they stirred slightly in the draught as the wind rushed round the house. The trailing dead grasses by the broken brick-work of the moat rustled and whispered together like the reeds by the riverside. The cloud-shadows, on the desolate southern lawn beyond that old mullioned window, chased one another in the white windy moonlight.

Suddenly Wroughton started from his reverie and looked up. The fire had burnt low; the great dingy room had become chilly. What had disturbed him? What noise was it that he had heard?

He poured out some cognac and tossed it off. As he put down the glass he heard the noise again.

Someone was tapping upon the window panes. He crossed the room, and dragged the heavy hangings wider apart; and then the figure of a woman, cloaked and hooded, stood revealed there upon the terrace flags outside, her face pressed against the diamond-shaped panes, looking into the room.

At sight of that beautiful, pale, resolute face, Sir Philip staggered back a pace or two, scared and horrified, clutching as he did so the curtain in his trembling hand.

"Great Heaven!" he gasped—"Who is it?"

"Let me in," said his visitor, again tapping peremptorily upon the old mullioned window.

"Let me in, I say, Sir Philip Wroughton!"

Hearing her voice, and in the next instant recognising her, Wroughton unfastened and pushed back the window; and Lina Ferris stepped at once into the room. It was a terrible moment for her, and she was astonished at her own intrepidity. But she had prayed for strength and courage in this hour, and her prayer had not been uttered in vain.

"You are—er—Miss Ferris, I believe, from Marley Mills?" Sir Philip said, when he felt that he had regained sufficient control over his voice to speak in a natural manner. "A—a—I mean, pray pardon me; I did not at first recognise you. To what cause, may I ask, am I to attribute the honour of this visit? If—if you are come here upon business of any kind, I really must refer you to—er—my agent and representative in all business affairs, Mr. Arminger. He is not at home, I know, this evening; but you would find him here in the office to-morrow."

As he spoke, he pointed carelessly to a chair; but Lina took no heed of the gesture. She remained standing motionless by the littered table. Sir Philip himself had sunk back into the arm-chair from which he had sprung at the sound of

the tapping on the window, eyeing with a scowl his unexpected and unwelcome guest.

What on earth did she want there at Moss-court Priory? Why was she not yet gone from the neighbourhood? Who was she? Why had she come? What right had she thus to invade his privacy—to disturb him with the sight of that hateful, haunting likeness. . . . How, indeed, did it happen that the likeness was there at all! He hated the girl fiercely for recalling those scenes and those memories which he fain would forget so long as he lived; and the expression which came over his features, as his eyes rested on Lina, was hardly good to see. Verily he then looked—in the language of shipshod Mrs. James—as though he "would stick at nothing" in order to accomplish his ends.

"I should indeed be greatly obliged to you if you would not worry me with your business to-night—whatever the nature of it be. I confess that I find myself at a loss to guess even its possible nature," he added impatiently, as Lina did not open her lips, but in stern silence met unflinchingly the lurid gaze of Wroughton's fierce eyes. "You must speak to Mr. Arminger in the morning; for I have letters to write now, and other matters to attend to, and—"

"Did you think, Sir Philip, that I was a ghost of the dead, a visitant from another world?" she inquired coldly and abruptly, "that you were startled so visibly just now at sight of me at the window?"

"A ghost?" he echoed sharply. "I don't understand you. And I have yet to be informed, remember, why you should appear in this unwarrantable manner at my library window when there are proper entrances to the house for the trouble of seeking them, Miss Ferris."

"I knew, Sir Philip, that if I knocked at your door and asked for an interview with you, you would unquestionably deny me admittance," was Lina's bold reply. "I knew, moreover, where you are mostly to be found alone of an evening. I have watched you here before."

He sprang again to his feet and confronted her. "Woman, who are you—what do you want?" he said savagely, flinging, together with his habitual drawl and languor, all courtesy to the winds. "Why are you here? What is it that you want of me, I say? What is it that you have to tell me? I am in no mood for these mysteries and interruptions to-night. Speak, can't you!—for, candidly, your presence here is an annoyance to me, to say the least, and I want you gone."

She flung back, ere she answered him, her furlined hood, and crossed her arms slowly with an air that was at once dignified and defiant.

"Speak!" cried Lina, as passionately as he, "I will, trust me, Sir Philip! Ah, kind Heaven!" half sobbed the girl, involuntarily lifting heavenward her beautiful agonised eyes—"give me words, give me strength; let them not fail me now! What have I to tell you?" she went on, rapidly recovering herself, with deepest scorn expressed in every line of her proud bearing. "I have to tell you, Sir Philip Wroughton—false, cruel, heartless man that you are—that you shall not, I repeat you shall not!—for I will move Heaven and earth to prevent it—marry and bring to misery another woman until you have first done justice to one who is dead; ay, and to the living—for I will have justice for the living too."

He moved quickly towards her then—murder in his eyes—his white hands twitching nervously. For a moment terror seized and paralysed Lina; she thought that those cruel hands were about to clutch her throat; that he was going to kill her.

"Bah," Wroughton said in the next instant, regaining with no apparent effort his lost composure—"you are a madwoman, I believe, and as such you should be treated! I know not who you are, nor do I in the least care to know. Your conduct, your wild assertions, are alike inexplicable"—moving leisurely towards the bell-handle—"or are rather, I imagine, the outcome of your madness—"

She went swiftly forward and stayed his hand. "You do care to know who I am—and you shall hear, too, who I am. It is no madwoman that stands here before you! I am," cried Lina, the disdain in her clear voice dying out, her tone

softening to a tenderer key as she uttered her dear mother's name—"the child of Evangeline Wroughton, once known hereabout as Evangeline Brooke. Sir Philip, listen to me! and you shall hear for the first time in your life the strange, true story of Jasper Brooke's daughter—Evangeline—your ill-used wife!"

The half-hour after ten o'clock had struck; it was close upon a quarter to eleven; and Mark Hernecastle, having wearied of his chilly resting-place, had deserted the pollard-stump and was pacing by the river-side.

He still watched there, still resolute in his purpose; he would intercept and surprise Lina Ferris on her way back from Moss-court Priory.

The moon had risen higher; the wind had winnowed the clouds; here and there a cold bright star gemmed the fairer parts of the troubled sky.

Presently that sound for which he had so obstinately waited smote faintly upon his listening ear. Yes, there were approaching footsteps at last—coming, too, from Moss-court Priory.

He beheld her advancing towards him along the misty meadow-path—slowly, wearily, as one fatigued with the toil of a long journey on foot. Her head drooped, her long dark cloak was held tightly about her. She looked, on nearer view, like a woman walking by the river in a dream.

Mark strode forward to meet her, was close to her, but she saw him not; not, indeed, until he spoke her name did she perceive and realise that he was actually there.

"Lina," he cried sternly, catching her by the wrist, "what is the meaning of this?"

He had frightened her horribly, and she was powerless to stifle the shriek which, in her terror, flew to her lips. For a few seconds she gazed helplessly to the right and to the left, as if seized with some wild idea of escaping Mark's questions by flight. But she was too weak for any measures so energetic; she would have staggered and dropped to the grass had he not flung his arm around her and thus held her upon her feet. He discerned then how deadly pale and worn was Lina's delicate face.

"Lina," he cried again, unconscious how free a use he was making of her christian name, nor scarcely conscious either that his manner was brusque and rough, "what is the mystery about you? What possible business, at this late hour, could take you to Moss-court Priory? Why cannot you trust us, Helen and me—are we not your friends? Did you mean to deceive us? Oh, surely not! And yet how would you have accounted to us for this strange disappearance, this prolonged absence, had I not by accident learnt where to seek you and found you here in the Moss-court meadows?"

She wrung her hands piteously, shaking her head as it dropped again to her bosom.

"I do not know—I cannot tell," she answered, hardly above a whisper. "I was wondering—wondering when you met me—what explanation I could give you of my conduct. Yes, I know all that you would say, but—oh, Mark!" she broke off, with something like a moan of despair, "I have done nothing wrong, do believe me—nothing wrong. Nothing to be ashamed of—only what is right and just! Trust me, trust me, Mark, yet a little while longer, and you shall learn the whole truth, shall be told everything—"

"My darling—Lina, my darling," he cried, with sudden passion; and he clasped her in his arms, strained her to his heart, for his own name breathed by those dear pale lips was to his ears like music direct from heaven—"forgive me if I was rough just now. I am a brute. I did not mean it; you know that. Trust you, my dear one! I will trust you until the end of—"

But Lina answered him not; resisted him not; his words were falling upon deaf ears. Her eyes had closed; her head was lying lifeless upon his shoulder. The strain and excitement of the last few hours had utterly exhausted her, and in Mark's arms she had fainted.

So Hernecastle, lifting her as tenderly and as easily as he would have lifted a young child, carried her home to the Lower Mills; home to the Lower Mills where Helen awaited them, marveling greatly at their non-appearance, and scared

out of her wits lest perchance some accident should have befallen them.

About midnight, on that same night, in the misty low-lying meadows of Moss-court, another figure—now the solitary figure of a man who lurched and reeled as he trod the familiar track—was to be seen making his difficult way in the direction of Moss-court Priory.

A few yards from that self-same spot in the narrow footpath on which Mark and Lina had a short while before met each other, the man stumbled, staggered, and fell heavily.

He tried to rise, but could not; no soul with friendly hand was near him. So helpless he lay there prone upon the damp earth, and slept the drunkard's sleep.

And the river flowed darkly and sullenly past; the reeds by the black waterside whispered plaintively, rustled like ghostly garments in the keen night wind. But the man stirred not; was conscious of naught; he was sound in his drunken sleep.

His hat was off and lay in the grass beside him; his fair curls were matted, his hot brow was cooled, with heaven's pitiful dew. And the high white moon, clear and pure in the now serene heavens above him, gazed sorrowfully down upon the beautiful upturned face of the man—which was the face of Guy Armingier.

(To be continued.)

DOLLIE'S LOVERS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE Persians have a fable that when the Garden of Eden disappeared from the face of the earth, one single flower was saved—a rose dowered with imperial and immortal loveliness. Once in a lifetime a breath of this rose fragrance is wafted to each one of us, bringing with it the very spirit of delight that dwelt in Paradise before Mother Eve thought fit to indulge her exceedingly ill-advised curiosity in the matter of the apple.

Frank Heron, walking from the station to the Red Gables—which was the house where his sweetheart lived—thought of this legend, and was distinctly of opinion that his hour for smelling the apocryphal flower had come. He was twenty-four years of age, had just passed his "final" examination for the Law, taken honours, and was now on his way to see Dorothy Fane, with a view to arranging the date of their marriage.

Under circumstances such as these, it is not difficult to feel happy, especially when you are in the green heart of one of the prettiest counties in England, when a sky like sapphire spreads its canopy over your head, and when you happen to be a very personable young man, with curly locks and a glossy moustache, of whose military beauty you are justly proud.

Frank's happy whistle only ceased as he found himself inside the gates of the Red Gables, and then he came to a sudden disgusted standstill while he contemplated the scene before him.

A very pretty scene! A sweep of level velvet turf, crossed by a gaily be-ribboned tennis net; in the background the deep sober colouring of the gabled house, with its porch a mass of clustering roses, and its white-curtained windows thrown open to the sunshine. A girl of fifteen, Edna Fane, stood on the edge of the lawn, balancing herself and her raquet, and under the copper beech sat Dorothy herself, talking vivaciously to a tall, fair, slim man, very fashionably dressed, who leaned easily against the back of the seat, and toyed with his eyeglass, while he smiled down into her sweet, delicate, mignonnette face.

At the sight of this man Frank experienced a shock, the odour of the rose vanished, and a grim, green-eyed phantom took its place. He had been looking forward so rapturously to this meeting with Dollie—picturing her start of

astonishment when she saw him, her cry of delight, her tender caresses as she threw herself into his arms—and here she was flirting with a strange man, whose admiration was very palpably declared by his eyes!

"Gracious me, if it isn't Frank!" cried out Edna, in loud surprise, and Dollie rose, flushed and fluttered, and came forward to shake hands—a mode of greeting that had the further effect of enraging her lover, who thought bitterly of the very different kind of welcome he had anticipated. He did not pause to consider how difficult it would have been for her to greet him in any other way at the present moment.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Frank," she said, with a shy joy in her blue eyes. "Why didn't you let us know you were coming?"

"Because I wished to astonish you. I am sorry now that I did not write."

"Yes," returned Dollie, innocently, "then I could have come to the station to meet you."

She stopped, and looked at him half deprecatingly, but his eyes were fixed on the fair-haired gentleman who was watching the scene with quiet amusement.

"Oh! I forgot. Let me introduce you. Mr. Heron, Mr. Verschoyle."

Both men bowed, then Frank turned sharply round, and spoke to Edna.

"Is your mother indoors? I should like to see her," and the two went off together.

"So that is Mr. Frank Heron!" observed Mr. Verschoyle, with a slight smile. "A good-looking young man, who does not seem to be in the best of humours."

"I daresay he's hot and tired," murmured Dollie, in apology. "It's a good way from the station, and the road is dusty."

"He has come straight here from the station?"

"Yes; I expect so. He would hardly go home first, because Brankmere is a mile and a half further on."

"Let me see—old Mr. Heron of Brankmere is his uncle?"

"Yes."

"And he is the heir, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, Frank spent his holidays at Brankmere because his parents were dead, and there was nowhere else for him to go; but Mr. Heron says he shall leave his money to another nephew—George. It seems rather a shame, because George is very well off already, while Frank has nothing save his brains to depend on."

"The old story—to him that hath shall more be given. I agree with you. Things are not divided fairly in this world, whatever may be the case in the next."

He was looking at her intently out of his peculiar pale eyes—eyes whose glance put one in mind of steel flashing blue-grey in the sunshine. They were strange eyes, insipid in repose, as was the rest of his face, but capable of lighting up wonderfully when he was at all excited, and also capable of expressing very considerable admiration whenever they rested on Dollie's face.

Dollie was quite aware of the admiration, and at other times it had not been exactly displeasing to her. At this moment, however, she was inclined to be annoyed, and wished very much that he would go, for she was anxious to get away to Frank.

Perhaps he guessed her thoughts, for he prepared to take leave.

"Good-bye—till to-morrow. To-morrow is your garden-party, is it not?" he said, making this speech the excuse for holding her hand a second or two longer than he need have done.

"Yes. Be sure you come early," and Dollie did not wait for him to shut the gate before she ran in the house to find Frank, who was in the morning-room with Edna, looking exceedingly dismal and bad-tempered.

"Well, what have you done with your Mr. Verschoyle?" flippantly asked Edna with that pleasing knack of saying disagreeable things which is possessed in so remarkable a degree by members of one's own family.

"You had better go out and see!" returned Dollie, reddening with visible anger.

"Oh, no"—pertly—"he's your admirer, not mine."

Dollie promptly ordered her younger sister out of the room, and when this mandate had been unwillingly obeyed, she put her hand gently on her lover's shoulder.

"Frank—dear Frank! I am so glad to see you once again," and then she slid down on her knees beside him, and leaned her head against his breast, while her left hand curved itself into his, and lay there, soft and warm, like a sun-kissed rose-leaf.

"Ugh!" grunted Frank, but he was only human after all, and already began to acknowledge that it was not altogether Dollie's fault that she was so pretty and attractive that men couldn't help admiring her, and, really, it was very hard lines to make a girl suffer for her misfortune of beauty.

"Won't you—won't you—kiss me?" in smothered tones that shook a little.

"If I thought you cared for me——"

"Why, you silly old goose, of course I do! What could possibly make you think otherwise?"

"That Verschoyle——"

"He's nobody," interrupted Dollie, slightly; "at least, he's nothing to me except a neighbour who plays tennis well, and who is rather agreeable."

"What brings him here every day?"

"Who says he is here every day?"

"Edna."

"Edna shall certainly go to school!" declared Edna's sister, with great firmness. "It is not true. Mr. Verschoyle comes pretty often certainly, because we are going to have a tennis tournament to-morrow, and he and I play together. Oh, Frank!" beginning to cry, "how can you be so unkind, so cruel! when you ought to know that I care for you more than for anyone else in the wide world!"

There may have been no logical sequence in Dollie's statement, but that did not make any difference to their effect, and Frank considerably moved by the close proximity of his sweetheart, allowed himself to be entirely convinced by her tears. So peace was restored, and the monster closed his green eyes once more.

"If it's any consolation to you," Dollie added, "I may mention that Mr. Verschoyle does not intend staying long in this neighbourhood. He took the Laurels furnished for six months, and three months are over now, so he has only three more before his tenancy is up."

After this, Frank told his news. "There's something I've been hiding from you, Dollie, because it seemed too good to write. I felt I must tell it you myself. I've been writing articles lately for a magazine, and—look here!" He produced a cheque for fifty pounds, and exhibited it before her dazzled eyes with supreme triumph. "What do you think of that?"

"It is too—too delightful!"

"And if I continue making money at this rate, Dollie, we shall be able to be married in less than two years!"

CHAPTER II.

THE tournament duly came off the next day, the weather being everything that was charming. Verschoyle made his appearance, got up *dé-viguer* in flannels, and Frank came to the conclusion that he would not be such a bad-looking fellow if his face were not quite so colourless; though why he would persist in playing tennis with an eye-glass stuck in one eye, he—Frank—couldn't make out.

In point of fact, Frank was inclined to judge his rival more favourably to-day—perhaps it would be unfair to hint that the reason of this might be traceable to the clearness with which he had demonstrated the superiority of his play over that of Verschoyle—who, little and active as he was, did not wield the racket with the ease of one accustomed to it from earliest youth.

After the tournament was over, little groups were formed, and Frank and Verschoyle took their stations behind Dollie, who was busy with the tea-cups.

"By the way," said a young doctor, named Dawe, who practised in the village, "have you had one of those notices from the chief constable,

warning you to keep a careful eye on the fastenings of doors and windows?"

"Yes," returned Dollie, more interested in cream and sugar than in police notices at this precise juncture.

"I have had one, too," put in Verschoyle, slightly. "But I pay no attention to it. These country police are always raising some bogey or another with a view of enhancing their own importance."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Dawe, who was an obstinate man. "There have been a good many burglaries lately, and it is supposed they have all been committed by the same gang. Why, it's only a month ago since Lady Easton's jewels were taken while the family were at dinner, and a few days afterwards all Colonel Freer's silver was stolen."

"And haven't the thieves been discovered?" asked Frank, with interest.

"No—not even a clue to them. The robberies are planned so carefully that they almost defy detection. It will be your uncle's turn next," added the doctor, jocularly. "We all know how rich he is, and that he keeps his gold in the safe in his bedroom."

"Yes," Frank added, grimly, "and a five-chambered revolver as well, which is always loaded and ready to his hand. He is a light sleeper, too, and the least sound awakes him, so that I don't fancy he runs much risk."

"Didn't you say that he was going to London next week?" asked Dollie, who, having no longer the burden of twelve cups of tea on her mind, felt herself free to join in the conversation.

"Yes. Next Tuesday. He will be back on Wednesday morning; for he can't bear being away from home an hour longer than is necessary."

"Then you will be the guardian of the safe," observed Verschoyle, with his fine smile. "It is to be hoped the burglars—if, as Dawe says, there is really a gang of them about—won't select that particular night for visiting Banksmere."

"I'll give them a dose if they do!" rejoined Frank, energetically.

"Is your room near your uncle's?"

"No, but I have a plan of hanging on electric bells on the windows that will ring out pretty loudly if they are touched. I shall be sure to hear that."

"A very good plan," commented Verschoyle. "Besides, I suppose your men-servants sleep in the house?"

"We only have one, and he sleeps at the lodge. I should rather like a tussle with burglars," added Frank, with the arrogant assurance of ignorance. "It would be fun—more fun for me than for them, I venture to bet."

No one contradicted him—perhaps because there was a vagueness about the position which did not require to be refuted, and so the subject dropped, and presently a message was sent out from Mrs. Fane, asking most of the guests to stay on to dinner and an impromptu dance afterwards.

Needless to say that few refused, and Dollie and Edna—who had only had vague hopes of this action on their mother's part—were in the seventh heaven of delight. The morning-room was quickly cleared out, and everybody declared that these impromptu affairs were always the pleasantest, and that they were sure they would enjoy it.

Now it happened that in spite of his various accomplishments Frank could not dance, and what made the fact the more painful was that he thought he could. He held his partner in a grip of iron, he saved at her arm like a pump-handle, he occasionally trod on her toes, and always got into collisions with other couples, so that the result of a dance with him generally meant a couple of yards of torn flouncing, to say nothing of acute physical torture consequent on the maceration of a pet corn.

Poor Dollie, as in duty bound, gave him the first valise, at the conclusion of which she had to retire in order to be "pinned up," and on her return Verschoyle waylaid her and asked her for the next dance.

Dollie hesitated a moment. She did not want to displease Frank, and on the other hand, she

had no desire to be rude to a guest. Finally she said "Yes," and the two were just taking their places with the other dancers, when Heron came up.

"This is my valise, Dollie."

"Oh no, Frank—I danced the last with you."

"Well, what of that?"—sulkily—"you promised me all your valises."

"Hardly that, Frank. I have promised this to Mr. Verschoyle. Go and ask Edna—she has no partner."

Dollie said this very gently, and with an imploring glance out of her blue eyes. As a matter of fact, Frank had rather worried her during the afternoon by his conspicuous devotion which she was inclined to regard as somewhat bad form, considering that she was the daughter of the house, and therefore owed certain duties to her guests, which his constant presence interfered with.

Verschoyle—who still retained the girl's arm—looked at Frank with a decided sneer in his strange, pale eyes, as he and Dollie floated off to the dreamy strains of "Myosotis."

Frank never took his eyes off them the whole time they were dancing, and he could not help confessing that their steps suited exactly, and that their movements were exquisitely timed to the delicious rhythm of the music.

He ground his teeth with impotent fury.

Dollie was evidently enjoying the valise thoroughly, and once, as Verschoyle bent to say something in a low voice, she blushed rosy red all over her face—(he had spoken of Frank himself, but this the watcher did not know).

Before this the astute reader will have detected poor Frank's weak point, and, even if he blames, will at all events pity him, for what in the world can be more pitiable than a jealous nature, especially when it is accompanied by a more than usually loving heart?

He did not accept Dollie's suggestion, and when her dance was over, she found him standing in exactly the same place, with a pale face and angry eyes.

"Look here, Dollie, I won't have you dancing with that fellow any more—do you hear?"

His very agitation gave his voice an extra harshness, and he spoke so loudly that one or two people near turned round to look.

Dollie grew very pale, but although her spirit rose in hot rebellion against this dictatorial tone she did not lose her self-possession.

"You forget yourself, Frank, in using that tone towards me," she said, quietly. "Remember that although we are engaged, I am not yet absolutely under your control, and as for not dancing with Mr. Verschoyle—I have promised him another valise, and I shall keep my promise."

"If you do I shall take it as a sign that you care nothing for me."

"If you choose to be unreasonable, I cannot help it. I certainly refuse to behave rudely to my mother's guests."

"You have heard what I said," exclaimed Frank, in a desperately earnest voice. "I'm not going to share your heart with anybody—I won't let you divide your favours between Verschoyle and myself. If you dance again with him, our engagement is at an end."

Poor Frank! His experience of women had not been large, or he would surely not have thus cut the ground from under his feet. If anything had been needed to make Dollie stick more firmly to her position it would have been this threat. She looked at him with something like scorn in her blue eyes—for indeed, her idol was disclosing his clay feet with very premature haste.

"Certainly," she said, coldly. "We need not wait for my dance with Mr. Verschoyle to declare our engagement at an end. It may be done at the present moment."

And she turned away, leaving Frank miserably conscious that he had made a fool of himself. He went into the window recess, and remained there, half hidden by the falling lace of the curtains, and from this coign of vantage, was enabled to see all that went on in the room. And the sight brought

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him the very reverse of pleasure. Dollie was not the sort of girl to wear her heart on her sleeve, or to let people guess that she and her lover had quarrelled. On the contrary, her colour grew deeper, and her spirits seemed to rise higher as she flitted about providing unappropriated girls with partners, and dragging the shy youths who didn't want to dance from the corners in which they had taken refuge. By-and-bye she was again floating round in Verschoyle's arms, and after the dance was over they followed the general exodus out on the lawn—for the night was soft and warm, and fragrant with a thousand sweet odours breathed forth by the drowsy flowers.

A young crescent moon was throned high up in the purple depths of sky, surrounded by her courtiers the stars, and the glamour of her light lay on the dewy earth like a spell. A little breeze whispered softly amongst the glossy laurel foliage, and the garden had borrowed a new beauty from the night's sweet alchemy.

"Is it not a delicious evening?" said Verschoyle. "It seems a shame to stay in the house. . . . Shall we sit under the copper beech for a little while?"

She assented mechanically, hardly knowing what she said, for her thoughts were with Frank, and when they were seated, she was still silent, and thankful that her companion did not want to talk.

Truth to tell her companion had more than an inkling of the true state of affairs, and was shrewd enough to guess that the girl must be smarting beneath the indignity laid upon her. Whether it was with the hope that her piqued vanity might induce her to wish to revenge herself on Frank, or whether his own love really became too strong to be mastered cannot be said, but all of a sudden Dollie woke up to the fact that he was telling her passionately how much he cared for her, that his arm was round her waist, and—that a baleful face, white and wild, was looking in at them through the parted branches.

Frank, urged by the jealous demon within him, had followed them out, and this was how his espionage was rewarded.

CHAPTER III.

POOR Dollie! The next four or five days were very miserable—more miserable than any she had ever known. Frank was still at Branksmere, but he neither came nor wrote, and she could only suppose that the words uttered in passion on the night of the dance, had been confirmed in the cooler judgment of the next day. Doubtless he had gone away with the idea that she was engaged to Verschoyle, for he had vanished the moment he was seen, and Dollie was miserably conscious that the situation really was rather compromising, for Verschoyle's arm had certainly been round her waist, and as certainly he had been pouring words of love into her unwilling ear.

She had refused him, with haste and agitation, and had hurried into the house, and since that moment had seen neither of her two lovers.

To her mother she said nothing, and Mrs. Fane, although her daughter's pale cheeks had not passed unnoticed, refrained with delicate reticence from asking her any questions. In spite of all, Dollie still hoped that Frank would come back to her, and ask pardon for his offences—of course it was clearly impossible she could seek him, except by the sacrifice of a maidenly dignity which she was very determined not to make.

On the Wednesday after the garden party she spent the evening at the Rectory, which was about two miles from her own home. She had not wished to go, but the engagement was one she could not very well get out of, and so she made a virtue of necessity. One of the maids from the "Red Gables" was sent to escort her home, and when they had got about half-way, a sudden storm of rain came on—a thunder shower that threatened to drench them to the skin.

Luckily they were near a field with a cattle-shed just inside the gate, and here they took re-

fuge amongst a pile of sticks. The shed was divided into two compartments by a roughly-woven partition of stakes, and as good luck would have it, they selected the farther of the two. Hardly had they been there three minutes when two figures—just distinguishable in the darkness—dashed through the gate, evidently with the intention of making for the same shelter.

"Get as far back behind the sticks as you can," whispered Dollie, to the servant, "and don't utter a word, then no one will know we are here."

She was not frightened, but it was after eleven o'clock, and the remembrance of the police notices came back to her inducing caution. If these men were villagers, well and good, but if they were tramps or strangers, it might be better not to let them suspect the presence of two unprotected women so near at hand.

The new comers naturally selected the compartment nearest to them—which Dollie had rejected in consequence of a hole in the roof—and one of them began cursing the weather with a singularly energetic heartiness.

It was still raining, and the night was dark as pitch.

"I don't mind it, bless you!" said the other, who seemed good-temperedly resigned. "If it's dark 'twill be all the better for our job to-night. Indeed the reason the captain fixed it so early as half-past twelve, was because the moon rises a little after one."

"And likely enough the Branksmere servants won't be gone to bed!" grumbled the first who seemed in a pessimistic mood. "I told the Captain it was a good deal too early. Why couldn't he wait till next week, when there'll be no moon till five or six o'clock?"

"Because to-night no one is sleeping in the room, where the safe is. Didn't I tell you that old Heron was gone to London, and the only man in the house was his nephew? The young fool is going to fit electric bells on the window, as a safeguard against burglars. Ha!—ha!"

His companion joined him in a hearty fit of laughter, as if poor Frank's precautions were a most excellent joke. Dollie and her servant—to whom, of course, this conversation was perfectly audible—hardly ventured to breathe in their endeavour to keep silence.

"How are we to get in?"

"Through the larder window. It is the easiest thing in the world. Then I shall open the back door, and you and the Captain will walk in, just exactly as if you were visitors invited to dinner. The captain himself will open the safe."

"Of course," acquiesced the more gloomy of the two worthies, in a tone of extreme satisfaction, "there's no one can do that job like the Captain. But suppose this nephew should happen to interrupt?"

"Then he'll have to be silenced," was the significant reply. "In fact, the Captain, altho' he's generally dead against blows, seems to have a grudge against the young fellow, and I don't fancy he'd mind giving him a wanner himself. It ought to be a good haul; and it's in sovereigns, too—at least the Captain thinks it is."

The conversation then turned abruptly into another channel, a burglary of the preceding week being discussed in terms of self-gratulation, and about ten minutes later, the rain having ceased, the two confederates took their departure, in happy ignorance of their disclosures having been overheard.

It took Dollie some minutes to collect her thoughts and decide on what was best to be done under the circumstances. It was quite clear that a robbery was planned, and the burglars intended effecting an entrance into Branksmere at half-past twelve o'clock—a little more than an hour from now. If by chance they should be discovered, and interrupted by Frank, the consequences might be terrible—Dollie shuddered as she thought of them, and of the cold-blooded way in which the men had spoken of "silencing" him.

Only an hour in which to get help! The girl was now about equidistant from the "Red Gables," the Rectory, and Branksmere itself. At home, the only male on the premises was the gardener, and he was ill; the Rectory factorum

was a superannuated old man, valourous only against the boys who stole his apples—surely, the best plan would be to go to Branksmere itself, where at the Lodge slept the gardener, who was an able-bodied Scotchman and, might be supposed, not destitute of personal courage. He and Frank inside the house, and prepared, ought to be able to defend themselves, even if it were impossible to procure extraneous aid.

Yes, Dollie decided upon proceeding thither without delay, and in a few words she told the housemaid her intention. The latter, not being quite so interested in Frank's safety as her young mistress, was at first inclined to demur, upon which Dollie said, decidedly,—

"Very well—if you don't like to come with me, you can go home by yourself."

This had the desired effect. Amelia, reduced to a condition of driving terror, would rather have walked twenty miles with a companion than twenty yards without one, and so, when Dollie set off, she swiftly followed in her wake.

It will be a long time before the remembrance of that walk fades from Dollie's mind. It had ceased raining, but clouds still overspread the sky, and heavy drops of water fell from the wet branches, plashing into the puddles below. Except this, a great silence reigned, and not a soul met or passed them on the lonely road.

When Branksmere was reached they found the gate closed and the Lodge in darkness—for the gardener and his wife had retired half-an-hour ago, and the former was by no means delighted to be disturbed.

His surprise when he saw Dollie and her companion was naturally very great, and it was not lessened when, as she passed through the gate, the young girl said, hurriedly,—

"Follow me up to the house as quickly as possible, Andrew, and if you have a gun or a pistol, bring it with you!"

Frank himself answered Dollie's knock at the front door—he had been just on the point of retiring, and held a bedroom candle in his hand, whose light shone upon his face—a very woe-begone face, as Dollie observed even at that minute.

"Dollie!"—in an accent of deepest surprise.

"Yes, it is I," hurriedly stepping inside.

"Close the door, Frank—I have something to tell you."

Frank did as he was bidden, and then Dollie became conscious of the base desertion of Amelia, who, fearful lest a foe might be lying in ambush somewhere about the garden, had prudently resolved upon waiting for the protection of Andrew in preference to that of her young lady.

In a very few words Dollie told all there was to tell, and when she finished, Frank's face looked quite different—the colour had come back to his cheeks—the light to his eyes. His first thought was not of his danger, but of her courage.

"And you came here on purpose to put me on my guard!" he exclaimed, breathlessly, seizing her hands in his. "Then, Dollie, you really must care for me in spite of all!"

Dollie thought this a very inopportune moment for love-making, but Frank was not of the same opinion—indeed the contemplated burglary was quite a secondary consideration just now.

"Tell me, Dollie—I won't loose you until you do!—that it is *me* you love, not Verschoyle!"

And Dollie—because she wanted to save time—answered his question truthfully, upon which Frank, in a rapture of delight, caught her in his arms, smothering her with kisses, and then fell to calling himself names—a brute, a fool, a driving idiot, an unmitigated ass, and various other opprobrious epithets—a species of amusement finally put an end to by the arrival of Andrew, with Amelia clinging desperately to his coat tails.

Frank, when recalled to the practical part of life, quickly made up his mind as to what was to be done. There was not time for him to drive Dollie home and come back in time to receive his unwelcome visitors, so he finally lodged her and Amelia in a room at the top of the house, with a door protected with many bars and bolts, and a window that defied all burglarious attempts by reason of its inaccessibility.

Of course, it was not pleasant leaving her, neither was it pleasant for her to be left—but Dollie was very brave; moreover, she had all her work cut out in the task of alternately scolding and consoling Amelia, who showed decided hysterical tendencies at the dramatic possibilities of the situation.

Andrew meanwhile was calmly cogitating, just inside the larder window, with his master's gun at his side—meditating on what particular part of the anatomy he should hit his man.

For nearly an hour was Dollie kept in her attic, listening with strained ears to every sound from below, and suffering a very agony of fear on Frank's behalf. It was all very well for him to laugh and make light of the danger, but after all he ran a considerable amount of risk, for the intruders were desperate men, who would not shrink even from the spilling of blood.

At last she heard a sort of subdued scuffle downstairs—sounds that would have been inaudible in the daytime but which the silences of the night accentuated. Then there was a pause, and her apprehensions grew so great that, heedless of Amelia's entreaties, she boldly unfastened the door, and went to the top of the stairs to listen.

A minute later, Frank came running up, eager and breathless, but evidently unhurt.

"Thank Heaven!" Dollie murmured, under her breath, while he prefaced matters generally by giving her a kiss.

"Well!" he said, elatedly, "we have collared two of the wretches, and I've spotted the third, so we're safe to have him before very long. We let the first man get in through the larder window, as they had arranged, and when he reached the passage, contrived to seize and gag him so that he did not utter a single cry, and we locked him in the cellar. In the meantime the others waited at the back door, and one of them, growing impatient, came and peeped in at the larder window, to make sure all was right. It was then that Andrew opened the door, and stood well behind it, so that the third man walked quietly in, believing it was his *confrère* who was admitting him. He was soon undeceived, for I grappled with him, but"—Frank added a little ruefully—"he was a much better wrestler than I, and before I knew where I was, he had thrown me down, and was showing a clean pair of heels. Now," said Frank, with a peculiar smile—"Andrew threw the light of his lantern on this man's face, and whom do you think it was?"

"How can I possibly tell!"

"A friend of yours."

"Nonsense!"

"But it is true. The leader of the gang of burglars was none other than Mr. Harvey Verschoyle!"

Yes, Mr. Verschoyle was indeed the captain of the burglars, who had honoured W—shire with their presence during the last two months, and it was owing to the fact of his knowledge of the entrances and exits of the different houses where he visited that the thieves had been enabled to carry on their depredations so successfully, and with comparative immunity, for so long.

Naturally, he felt a slight delicacy in returning to the Laurels after his recognition by Frank, and it is presumed he made all haste to quit the country, taking with him the proceeds of the robberies, and leaving his two confederates to the tender mercies of Judge and Jury!

His attempt on Mr. Heron's safe produced an effect that assuredly had not entered into his calculations, inasmuch as the old gentleman was so delighted with the conduct both of Frank and Dollie, that he actually offered to settle a hundred a year on them, on condition of their marriage taking place at once!

Needless to say, the munificent offer was immediately accepted and the condition fulfilled before he had time to change his mind!

[THE END.]

BLOOD travels from the heart through the arteries at the rate of a mile in seven and one-third minutes—twelve feet in one second.

MARSH FAIRY.

—20—

(Continued from page 489.)

He allowed no silence between them after that. Olive would scarcely have known the grave and earnest man in the light, frivolous person who entertained her on the way to the hospital. He told her stories, and more than once she found herself laughing at his drollery in spite of the sorrow she was undergoing.

They were at the hospital but for a few moments, when they were ordered away by the physician, but when again they were in the street his spirits seemed to have forsaken him, and he walked onward with bent head, saying nothing.

"You will come in?" she asked of him when they had arrived at the home of Grace Thornton.

"Not to-night," he answered, gently. "I shall see you to-morrow, if I may."

"Thank you a thousand times for all that you are doing for me."

He did not reply, neither did he look at her as he took his leave, but he pressed her hand in a clasp that hurt her. It was not that, however, which brought the tears to her eyes as she watched him out of sight.

She made no spoken comment, but the grief—the suppressed passion in her eyes—would have told its own story to an observer.

She let herself in, and inside the hall she found a messenger awaiting her. She tore the note open that he gave her, and read hastily:

"Come with the messenger at once. Something of importance has happened, and I need you without delay. Come alone if possible."

JACK.

She breathed a sigh of relief at having heard from him at last, and motioned to the messenger that she was ready, she followed him down the street.

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE was nothing by any means elegant in the apartment to which the messenger led Olive. On the contrary, nothing could have been much more simple and plain. But it was such a vast improvement upon the hut in the heart of the marsh, that to Jack it lacked nothing of the elegance of a sumptuous palace.

Olive was much surprised to find him in bed upon her arrival, and to learn that he had been very ill since the scene in the bank.

"They never told me that you were ill and I never suspected it!" she cried, as she kissed his cheek. "Oh, Jack, I hope it has not been very bad!"

"No," he answered; "it was only fretting about what had happened to you that hurt me. As far as the sickness was concerned, I did not mind that much. But look about, Olive. Isn't it jolly? I tell you, Maurice Lemaître is a brick."

"Have they been kind to you, dear?"

"Kind? Well, I should say so. My own brother could not have done more for me than he has. But there is lots that I want to say to you, and not much time to say it in, as I don't want him to know that you have been here. It doesn't seem exactly the straight thing to deceive as good a friend as he has been about anything, but I promised not to tell him this, and I must not."

"Promised whom?"

"The gentleman. Wait till I come to it and you shall know. I don't suppose he would have agreed to my telling you if he had known; but nothing was said of you. I know that what I am going to say will surprise you; but listen."

He raised himself on his elbow, his eyes shining with excitement, and looked at her. There was a flush upon either cheek and a tremulous smile upon the lips, as if the news he had to communicate was almost too good to be true; but he waited a moment to moisten his lips before continuing.

"I have a great offer, Olive."

"A great offer?" she repeated, wonderingly.

"Yes," he replied, scarcely above a whisper—"yes. I have heard a great many things about myself and about our family, dear, that have hurt and surprised me; but after all, Olive, I am inclined to think that matters have turned out for the best. I have the strangest thing to tell you, dear, that you ever heard in your life, but you must promise me to be very silent on the subject before I tell you."

"Yes, yes, I promise. But you are talking so—so incoherently, Jack. Are you sure that it is—is not—fever?"

"It does sound like it, doesn't it?" he said, excitedly. "No, it is not fever. Well, Olive, it is this: I am not the son—of our father, at all."

"You are—not the son of—our father—Jack! Are you mad? What are you saying?"

She shrank back from him with a little cry of horror, and drew her arm away as if the touch of his hand upon it hurt her. But Jack's excitement was so great that he could scarcely see her, much less understand the impression that he had made.

"It is the most singular thing in all the world!" he cried, breathlessly. "I don't understand it all myself, but I will very soon; he said so. Don't you remember, Olive, how I used to tell you that father did not look at me as if he loved me, but as if he pitied me? Did I not tell you that his expression was filled with remorse instead of affection? Well, it was quite true. I seem to see it all now just as I would a picture that was placed before me. It was quite true. It was remorse that he felt. He did pity me, for, Olive, it was he who made me what I am. It was he who robbed me of the form that other boys possess, and made my life a curse to me. It was he who made me the helpless cripple that you see."

"Jack!"

There was never more horror contained in a single word than that one expressed. Olive had staggered to her feet and stood there looking down upon the boy with an expression of white-hot anger, of passion and shame that could never have been reproduced nor described.

"It is true!" he cried, raising himself yet higher in bed. "He told me!"

"He! Who—who told you this vile and dastardly thing?"

"Mr. Naylor, the—"

"Ah!"

The interruption came almost like a cry of insanity. Olive flung her hands up before her face as if to restrain her passion, but it was too great to be borne quietly.

"He told you that, did he?" she cried, hoarsely. "He told you that? And you—you believed him! You were cowardly enough to allow that vile and wicked man to come to you and traduce the only friend you have ever known! You allowed him to poison your mind against your own father, a martyr and a saint, until now you are ready to disown him! You listened, and believed the cruel falsehoods that he has spoken—you, the son of Vincent Farquhar, and my brother! I cannot believe it. Oh, shame, shame! Shame upon you!"

"But you have not heard—"

"Nor will I hear! There is but one thing under heaven that could make a murderer of me, and that is one word uttered against my suffering father. If the whole world stood before me and told me he was guilty—if he himself were to speak the words that condemned him—I would not believe it! There is but one proof under heaven that could be offered that you are not my father's son, and that you have given yourself—in that you are capable of believing what you have. Oh, traitor!"

"Olive!"

"Do you know who it is that has told you this?" she continued, without pausing for breath. "Do you know what manner of man it is that has the courage to come to Vincent Farquhar's own son with the vile lie that he has dared to utter? It is the man who murdered your mother! It is the man for whose sin Vincent

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Farquhar has suffered as never mortal man suffered before!"

"Olive, what are you saying?"

"The truth, as there is a heaven above us! The truth, and I will prove it, if I must work to the day of my death, and slave and starve to do it! I swear that my life shall have no other incentive, no other motive, until I have done it! Nor will I be content with proving his innocence alone. I will prove Marcus Naylor's guilt. I will see him where he has seen my father. I will drag him down from his high estate and place him behind the bars of a prison cell, a convicted murderer. No matter what the cost may be to me, nor to you, nor to any other being that lives, I swear that I will do that! The proof exists, and I will have it if I must sell my life-blood drop by drop—if I must sell my soul!"

Jack had sunk back upon his pillows, pale, almost lifeless. His eyes were set and glazed; his lips were rigid and blue. He looked as if death had settled in every line of his face. But if Olive saw, there seemed to be no pity in her heart for him.

She looked like a beautiful avenging goddess as she stood there with her arm raised, her face flushed with excitement, her eyes literally ablaze with righteous indignation. She seemed absolutely transformed under the tremendous passion that was upon her, but the feeble sound of Jack's voice reached her through it.

"If what you say is true," he stammered, "then Heaven forgive me!"

She turned and looked at him. She had loved him all her life as few sisters love, and the rigidity of his mouth startled her. Not as it would have done in the old days; but it calmed her, and she went nearer to him and touched his hand.

"You need the forgiveness of Heaven," she said, solemnly. "Our father was innocently convicted of the murder of our mother. He has suffered for fourteen long years as never man did before; but the hardest blow his life has ever held would have been inflicted if he had known that you believed him guilty."

"But why should Marcus Naylor—" he began feebly, but was unable to complete his sentence.

"I don't know," she answered, hanging her head in shame. "They say that—our mother—sinned. I never knew her, Jack; she died when I was so young; but I do know my father. We will believe the best of her; we will believe what our father tells us is the truth. But there was a motive—and that I will discover."

"And you will let me help you, Olive?"

The voice was humble, supplicating, and she bent and kissed his brow.

"Yes, you shall help me," she answered unsteadily. "But you must never let any human being implant in your mind a doubt of him again."

"If you had heard what I heard, Olive—"

"I should have struck the man dead that dared utter the accursed words. There! There is one good that you have done: you have aroused me from an apathy that had fallen on me. I had not thought of revenge, but only to remove the cloud that rested upon my father's name. I had thought to spare his betrayer, Marcus Naylor, because of one who has been our only friend when we needed a friend the most; but it is too late now. Noel Chatteris will help me, though he must not know my plan. You must say nothing, Jack, either to Marcus Naylor or to Maurice Lemaitre, of my having been here to-day. You really wish to help me?"

"You know I do."

"Then tell me, quickly but carefully, every word that Marcus Naylor has spoken to you."

CHAPTER XX.

ALL the eagerness had died from Jack's countenance, and he lay back, weak and half exhausted, upon his pillows. He was silent for some time, evidently striving to gain strength to continue. He succeeded after a time, and turning his face wearily toward his sister, he began the story.

It was a painful effort for him, but he stood

the test well, repeating the conversation, as nearly as he could remember it, word for word. It was a cruel story and a perfectly plausible one. More than once Olive shrank away with a little cry of horror, but when he paused she motioned him to continue.

It would be useless to repeat the wicked, cruel lie that made of the martyr a wretch, and of the real murderer a hero; but when Jack had finished the recital, Olive could understand readily enough how he had been deceived by it.

"He offered to send me to college," Jack concluded, "until I had completed whatever course was agreed upon, and then to start me in a business that would eventually make my fortune."

"And what were you to do in return for all that?" asked Olive.

"Nothing," answered the boy, dreadingly. "He made no demand of me, save that I was to go at once."

"I don't understand it," she said, after a thoughtful pause—"I don't understand it. I can see nothing that he can expect to accomplish by it, but we must not expect to analyse the motives of a villain such as he. But it is all false, Jack. Every word, from beginning to end, is a vile and cruel lie. You believe that, do you not?"

"I believe it!"

"Then let it remain as it is for the present. If he comes here again, you must not allow him to know that we suspect him. Say nothing of having seen me. When we are dealing with scoundrels there is but one way to do, and that is to meet them upon their own ground. Take care. If you would help me save our father, you must not let Marcus Naylor know that you do not believe every word that he says. You will do that, Jack?"

"I will try."

"And you will succeed for father's sake. I am going now, dear, see that not even Mr. Lemaitre shall suspect that I have been here. Good-bye, Jack, and Heaven bless you!"

"You will come if I send for you again?"

"You know I will. It may be that I shall want to see you before you send. If I should what is the best hour for me to find you alone?"

"About this hour."

"And there is nothing that you want?"

"Nothing."

She kissed him tenderly. He lifted his eyes to hers, swimming in tears.

"You think that he will forgive me, Olive?" he asked, weakly.

"We will never tell him that you doubted him, dear. It would only add to his suffering, and could benefit no one. Be sure you let me know if anything happens."

She kissed him again and went out quietly, shutting even the front door behind her noiselessly. She did not see the pair of eyes that watched her as she went, with an expression of determination and cruelty in their depths, as she did not even glance behind her, but hurried up the street and on to the home of Grace Thornton.

She went immediately to the library, thinking to find her friend; but there was no one there but Nurse Dawson.

The old woman started slightly when she saw who it was that stood there in the open door, but before she could put down her book and prepare for an escape Olive was beside her. She drew a small stool to the side of her former nurse, and took the wrinkled hand in hers.

Mrs. Dawson grew a trifle pale, but there was no escape, and she saw it.

"How excited you are, Olive!" she said, nervously. "Where have you been, child?"

"I am just going to tell you," cried Olive, with sudden determination. "Nurse, in the old days, when I was a little helpless child, you took care of me. You are the only mother that I remember. Don't you recall the times when you used to sit of evenings and tell us stories—Jack and me—until we each fell asleep, soothed by the very sound of your dear old voice? Don't you remember how you used to teach me to tell fortunes, and how you laughed at me for the skill that I attained? Don't you recall all our lives together during those happy years—the only happy ones that I have ever known?"

Olive waited for some reply, but none came. She looked up into the wrinkled face, but Nurse Dawson was looking over her head with a curious expression upon her withered countenance. Her lips were slightly parted, and quivered a trifle as if under an intense emotion, and after a little silence, Olive continued,—

"I looked upon you as my mother then, nurse, and I believed that you loved me. And you did did you not?"

"Heaven knows I did," answered the old woman, more as if she spoke from the influence of emotion than memory.

"Well, there came a time when you left us. I never knew why, but the man who took us from you we called father. I knew that he was our father, because you had sometimes taken us to see him in a great, bare house that always seemed so cold and damp and horrible to me. You told us that he was our father, and that we must love him when he took us away. I remember that. And we did love him, nurse. There were times when we almost starved together; but he was never anything but the kindest, gentlest, most loving father with which God ever blessed two friendless children. I can't tell you how he suffered. I could never picture to you—"

"Don't!" interrupted the woman, hoarsely. "I know it all. There is nothing that you could tell me. It might have been different if I had known where he was, but I never did. I—"

She stopped suddenly, as if she realised that she was either saying too much or was about to be betrayed into it. There was something of a frightened expression about the haggard eyes that puzzled Olive. She looked at the care-worn face for a little while, then she lifted herself and wound her arms about the old woman's waist.

"Nurse," she said, softly, "you knew my mother and my father. You knew and loved us as children. Now, for the sake of that past, for the sake of my dead mother and of my suffering father, and his two helpless, friendless children, tell me all of their lives that you remember. Tell me everything that happened from the time that you went to live with them until the day that you delivered us up to him. Will you do that?"

"Why do you want to know?" asked the woman, half wildly. "Why is it that you wish me to tell you that?"

Olive hesitated a moment, then she said, slowly,—

"Because Marcus Naylor has said that Jack was not my father's son!"

The old woman sprang to her feet.

"It is a lie!" she cried, huskily; "a brutal, cruel lie! She was a foolish woman. She listened to the words of a scoundrel, and she learned to love him, but she did no other wrong. I swear it to you. She was never guilty, never; but your father would not believe it. He thought her the vilest thing under heaven, because he read that foolish note. It was that which caused all the horrible, ghastly trouble that came upon them both. But she was only weak, never wicked. I will not, can not allow you to believe it!"

Olive was astonished at the vehemence of the speech; but she saw that she must control herself if she would learn all that Nurse Dawson knew. Somehow, Olive felt that to be more than the old woman cared to reveal. She stood up and drew Nurse Dawson soothingly down upon the couch.

"Oh, how glad I am," she said, gently, "to hear you speak like that! I feel that you are right. I knew that it must be true; but, oh! it is such a comfort to hear another say it."

She waited for a moment to allow Mrs. Dawson time to recover herself, then continued, gently,—

"You will tell me the story now connectedly, will you not? You believe in my father's innocence; you know my mother to have been pure; you have loved us from childhood. Who should help us if not you? And you will do it, will you not, nurse?"

"Marcus Naylor said that she was guilty?" repeated the old woman, as if in a dream. "He said that she was guilty?"

"Yes," assented Olive, eagerly. "He said it to Jack."

"It is too bitterly cruel!" she cried, hoarsely—

"too bitterly cruel! I always told him that I would never allow that. It is false—false, I tell you—and Marcus Naylor shall suffer for it. I might have borne the other in silence, but that a child should believe her mother a wanton is more than I can bear. He has no one to blame but himself. Heaven help me! the time has come at last!"

"Then you will tell me?"

"I will tell you. Listen."

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

SCRIGHT of hand—refusing an offer of marriage.

A PESHIMIST likes a thing he can't enjoy, and an optimist enjoys a thing he can't like.

A MAN who lost collars in a laundry refers to the institution as a big iron and steel syndicate.

WEARY WATKINS: "I've got such a pain in my stummick." Hungry Higgins: "You're in luck. I haven't even got that in mine."

SHE: "I can sympathise with you. I was married once myself." He: "But you weren't married to a woman."

"THERE'S a time to work and a time to play," but to the hand-organ grinder both times come at once.

"I MIND it is always best to keep cool," said the snow. "Exactly," replied the sidewalk. "I catch your drift."

"Who is that pretty little blonde yonder?" "You don't know her? Why she is the pretty little brunette whom you saw here last night."

JAYSMITH (worsted in a discussion): "I won't argue with a fool." Cumsio (cheerfully): "I will. Now, that point you disputed last. I—But Jaysmith had escaped."

"BRIDGET, where are the oyster crackers that I ordered?" "Faith, mum, an' I broke ivery wan av thim, and divil av an oishter could I find in one, an' I sint them straight back."

Mrs. BINKS: "Do you believe that story of the young woman swallowing a razor." Mr. Binks: "Well, I dunno. Perhaps someone told her that razors were good for the complexion."

A COARSE, ill-natured man died one day, and his friends assembled at the funeral, but no one had a good word to say about the deceased. At length a kind-hearted German, as he turned to go home, said: "Vell, he was a good schmoker."

"I WONDAH, now, where I got these seven halfpence, doncher know," said Goslin, as he drew forth some small cash from his pocket. "You must have changed your mind," suggested his friend Dolley.

"WHAT is a commercial traveller?" asked little Tommy of his father. "A commercial traveller, my son," said his father, "is a man who travels over the country and shows hotel men how to run their hotels."

PUBLISHER: "You have the climax of the story in the second chapter. Why do that?" Author: "It is a patent scheme of my own to keep women who read it from knowing how the story is going to turn out."

"WHEN I was once in danger from a lion," said an old African explorer, "I tried sitting down and staring at him, as I had no weapons." "How did it work?" asked his companion. "Perfectly; the lion didn't even offer to touch me." "Strange! How do you account for it?" "Well, sometimes I've thought it was because I sat down on a branch of a very tall tree."

JONES BROWN is rich and stingy. An acquaintance of his met Brown's son the other day and said, "Your father seems to have lost a good deal of money lately. The last time I saw him he was complaining, and saying he must economise." "Economise! Did he say where he was going to begin?" "Yes; on his table," he said. "Then he must be going to take away the tablecloth," was the filial declaration.

ELDERLY MAIDEN (out rowing with a possible suitor and a little sister who is frightened by the waves): "Theodora, if you are so nervous now, what will you be at my age?" Little Sister (meekly): "Thirty-seven, I suppose."

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, you wouldn't believe it, but it's true, that these weights are so delicate that they mark the difference between a blonde and a brunette hair." "And which weighs the less?" "The lighter one."

FORCED BARBERY.—"You admit that you bribed the witness, as the other side charges?" Lawyer: "Yes, your honour; but—" Judge (severely): "What?" Lawyer: "I bribed him to tell the truth. He was going to lie for the other side."

PRUNELLA: "Did you tell the gentleman I was out, Mario?" Her Maid: "Yes, Miss Prunella." Prunella: "Did he seem to believe you?" Her Maid: "Not until I said that you told me to tell him so."

"AND now," said the country cousin to the girl, "I have shown you everything on the farm." "Oh, George, you haven't done any such thing. Why, I heard papa say before I started that you had a mortgage on it that covered nine-tenths of the ground."

MISS ROMANCIE: "Oh, I just adore music." Old Baldie: "You play, I believe." Miss Romancie: "Play and sing both. What sort of a man ought a woman who loves music to marry?" Old Baldie: "Well—or—I really can't say; a deaf one, I suppose."

A REVERSIBLE OVERCOAT.—"I say, Jones, your overcoat looks shabby. Why don't you get a new one?" "Mose Soläumberg has shut down on my credit." "Then take it to a tailor and have it turned." "Humph, do you think that this coat has three sides?"

MISTRESS (to cook): "But why do you want to leave, Mary?" Cook: "I don't like the cookery, mum." "Why, you cook the things yourself?" "Yes, I know, mum. But I'm only a plain cook, and I thought when I came here that you would make some tasty dishes now and again, mum!"

It is said that when a famous French general was obliged to retreat, as he and his aide-de-camp were fleeing before the enemy, he breathlessly inquired, "Who are the rear guard?" "The men that have the poorest horses, general," replied the aide, who was making good use of his spurs.

"You were looking at the clock!" he said, as he observed her glancing at it several times. "Yes," she answered with a faint smile. Then he arose and went over to the mantel and looked at the timepiece for full half a minute. "I don't see anything the matter with it," he said as he returned to his seat. And he stayed an hour longer.

A CERTAIN young lady is in all ways "up to date." Recently a society man, who was supposed to have aspirations, not wholly hopeless, for her hand, while waiting for her to descend to the drawing-room, embraced the opportunity—and the pretty housemaid. The lady, entering at that moment, simply remarked: "I thought I told you, Mary, to receive your guests in the kitchen."

A YEAR or two ago a young curate was teaching a class of boys in a London Sunday school, and he chose the history of David for his subject. "Now, boys," he said, "David was a shepherd, a courtier, and a king. What is a shepherd?" "Him what looks after the sheep and lambs," was the ready answer. "Yes. Well, now, what is a courtier?" Hesitation for a moment, then a bright little boy spoke in a hurry, for fear some one might cut in with the answer before him, "Please, sir, him as goes after a gal!"

GEORGE: "What's wrong?" Jack: "I can't make out what Miss Pinkie's little present to me means." George: "If it's useful, it means that she is interested in your comfort; and would probably say 'yes.' If it's only ornamental, it means that the present is sent merely as a little token to a friend." Jack: "The one she sent me is both useful and ornamental. It's a handsomely decorated individual salt-cellar." George: "That means that she considers you both useful and ornamental, but a little too fresh."

"I HELL overboard," said the sailor, "and the shark came along and grabbed me by the leg." "And what did you do?" "I let him have the leg. I never disputed with a shark."

PRISON MISSIONARY: "Ah, you have a pet, I see!" Convict: "Yes—this rat. I feeds him every day. I think more o' that 'ere rat than any other livin' creature." Missionary: "Ah, in every man there's something of the angel left, if one can only find it. How came you to take such a fancy to that rat?" Convict: "He bit the keeper."

SEEDY INDIVIDUAL (approaching): "My dear sir, you look like an American. I am one of your countrymen. For Heaven's sake help me to get something to eat!" Tourist (recognizing): "Why, Bugley, old boy, is this you?" Seedy Individual: "Yes, Cholly, old fellow." Tourist: "Why, what could have brought you to this?" Seedy Individual (wiping away a tear): "A book called 'How to make a trip to Europe on two hundred dollars;—but—but it didn't say how to get back.'"

DR. GOODALL was proverbially fond of punning. About the same time that he was made Provost of Eton he also received a stall at Windsor. A young lady of his acquaintance, while congratulating him on his elevation, and requesting him to give the young ladies of Eton and Windsor a ball during the vacation, happened to touch his wig with her fan, and caused the powder to fly about. Upon which the doctor exclaimed: "My dear, you see you can get the powder out of the cannon, but not the ball!"

"I DON'T mind your daughter's practising ten hours a day in the next flat," said the tenant in the apartment house, "even if she does keep the piano cover up and the forte pedal down. But I would like faintly to suggest that thirty-six hundred and fifty hours a year of Chopin's second nocturne has made a slight change seem desirable. Would you mind asking her to play the third or fourth nocturne on Tuesdays and Fridays, so that my wife can have a different kind of headache by way of relief?"

A STAGNANT teetotaler and an enthusiastic fisherman had a good stretch of the Dee to fish in, and engaged the services of an experienced boatman. But night after night he came back with empty creel, and at length departed in disgust. When he was gone, the boatman was approached and asked how it was that a fairly expert fisherman had such a run of ill luck. "A weel," said the man, "he had no whuskie, and I took him where there was nee fush."

"WHAT are you going to call your newspaper?" asked the friend who had dropped in to see the aspiring young journalist. "The Palladium," was the reply. "That's a good name for a newspaper. By the way, what is the meaning of the word?" "It means—hum—it means—why, you know what a palladium is, don't you?" "No. I'm asking for information." "Well, that's a good one on you! Lived in a civilised community all your life and pretend you don't know what a palladium is!" "I'm in earnest. What is it?" "Why, a palladium is—Great Caesar! Look at that dog-fight!" "Saved!" howled the young journalist, pouncing on the dictionary the instant the door closed on his visitor's retreating form.

"You told me that you were going to a spiritualistic seance last week," said young Hepburn to his chum, McCue, as they were playing a game of billiards at the club the other evening. "Did you go?" "Oh, yes," replied the other, as he leisurely proceeded to chalk his cue, "I went." "Well, said his friend, inquiringly, "anything out of the way happen?" "Well, rather," said McCue. "We had spirit-rapping and table moving, and other things be-ides, and the whole affair went off splendidly until the medium went into a trance, and then announced that he was the spirit of a man who had had his umbrella stolen, and that the thief was in the room." "And what happened then?" queried Hepburn. "Well," replied his chum, "the whole party made a dash for the door, and I was afraid that if I stayed behind I might be taken for the thief, so I retreated with the rest."

SOCIETY.

BOTH the Czar and King of Siam ride bicycles. THE Princess of Wales is one of the most graceful lady skaters in Europe.

THE Prince of Wales, and the Kaiser have declared that they will not visit the World's Fair.

It is stated that Princess Victoria of Teck will perform the ceremony of naming the *Speedy* when that vessel is launched.

THE Queen intends to confer the Grand Cross of the Bath upon Prince Frederick Charles when he is at Windsor, and he will be invested there by her Majesty.

THE Princess of Wales has a nervous dislike to her first appearances in public again, and it is believed that her Royal Highness wishes to resume her place very quietly and by degrees.

THE Queen of Roumania is going to build a villa close to Lake Maggiore. She has often visited the lake during the summer, and has always evinced a great liking for the spot. In all probability her Majesty will spend a greater part of the year at her new residence.

THERE is such a diversity of lights at Windsor Castle that those with the best eyesight are dazzled by them; in fact, the chief passage or corridor is illuminated by four different kinds of lights, old and new, and Prince Albert's room is lighted up all night. The Queen's eyesight is very good, she never wears glasses except when reading or writing.

A QUITE elaborate programme for the Queen's Continental visit has been sketched out, and if it is carried into effect her Majesty will conclude her visit to Florence about the third week in April and will then pay a visit of a few days to Venice, finishing up with a few more days at the Palace of her grandson, the Grand Duke Ernest of Hesse-Darmstadt.

THE forthcoming season promises brilliantly for society and tradespeople. What with the forthcoming marriage of the Heir Presumptive, the promised "Court" to be held by her Majesty, the opening of the Imperial Institute by the Queen, and the possible visit of their Majesties of Italy, there is so far nothing to grumble at. The Imperial Institute is to be opened with great ceremony.

It was recently hinted that the serpentine dance was losing its charm as a mild form of feminine dissipation. Step-dancing, it was added, was coming into favour; and we were told that the gavotte, the minuet, and the saraband would soon follow. Some ground for hope for the welcome change is supplied in the news which reaches us from Vienna, of the success of the revival of the minuet at the annual charity ball, given by the White Cross Society in that capital. The graceful old measure was danced by no less than twenty-eight couples, and remarkably pretty was the effect.

THE Queen received at Osborne portraits of Princess Marie of Edinburgh, and the Princess Margaret of Prussia, taken in their wedding-dresses. The Queen is having portraits sent to her galore, so that her private collection at Osborne has to be split up and part of it taken to Windsor Castle. The big album recently presented to her Majesty by the German Emperor and Empress is really too heavy to be carried about. It is clasped and covered with thick sovereign gold, and contains very large photographs, all "made in Germany."

THE Duchess of Edinburgh will remain in Russia for about two months, after which she will go to Bucharest to visit the Prince and Princess of Roumania. The Duchess has taken a final farewell of Devonport, and it is very doubtful whether she will come even to London this year. The Duchess of Edinburgh who prides herself on her tact and *finesse*, has gone to Russia in the hope of establishing a good understanding between her brother, the Emperor, and the King of Roumania, and she is particularly anxious that Prince and Princess Ferdinand shall be invited to visit the Imperial Family at Peterhof next summer.

STATISTICS.

SEVEN hundred languages are spoken in Africa. BRAZIL raises nearly 500,000 tons of coffee a year.

BETWEEN the years 1882 and 1886 over 2,000 persons fell victims to brigands in Italy.

IN the Austrian army suicides average 10,000 a year. This does not include foiled attempts, and it represents 20 per cent. of the general mortality among the Austrian soldiers.

THE furthest distance which sound has, up to this time, been known to travel was 1,600 miles, on the occasion of a volcanic explosion in 1815 at the Tomboro Mountain, in the island of Sum-bawa.

GEMS.

REBUFF is a wet blanket that dampens ardour. To do everything when it ought to be done is the soul of expedition.

HE who would exert influence must exercise judgment.

THE grandest and strongest natures are ever the calmest. Restlessness is a symbol of weakness not yet outgrown.

BECAUSE half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, while thousands of great cattle, reposing beneath the shadow of the mighty oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CORKS warmed in oil make excellent substitutes for glass stoppers.

BAKED SWEETS.—Wash and dry the fish thoroughly in a cloth; cover them with fine bread crumbs, and place little pieces of butter over them; season and bake for twenty minutes.

HAM PATTIES.—One pint of ham which has previously been cooked, mix with two parts of bread crumbs, wet with milk. Put the batter in gem pans, break one egg over each, sprinkle the top thickly with cracker crumbs, and bake until browned over. A nice breakfast dish.

CREAMY RICE PUDDING.—Wash two spoonfuls of rice in three waters, pour over it one quart of milk, add two spoonfuls of sugar, half a cup of raisins and a little nutmeg; cook slowly and stir often. Do not let a crust form until the rice is soft. When the milk begins to be creamy do not stir it any more, but let a light brown crust form on top. Serve warm.

ORANGE SHORTCAKE.—Make a rich crust as for strawberry shortcake by spreading one thin cake with butter, and placing another on the top of it before baking. Pare five large oranges, squeeze out the pulp and juice, discarding the pith and seeds, and sweeten to taste. Separate the layers, spread with butter, then with the prepared filling, placing a layer of the latter over the top, and on this heap sweetened whipped cream, and serve.

FROZEN EGGS.—In the winter season, quantities of eggs are frozen, and it is generally considered that such eggs are worth but little, and are much injured for cooking purposes. This, however, is not strictly true, for if properly treated they are but little injured. Instead of (as was the custom) putting them into cold water to take out the frost, and waiting several hours for the thawing to take place, and then finding the yolks in such a solid state that they can be used with no satisfaction in cooking, try the following method:—Place them in boiling water and leave them there from five to twenty minutes according to the amount of frost in them, when, upon their being opened, the yolks will be found in such a state that they can be used for almost any culinary purpose.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE umbrella is a Chinese invention.

THE heads of all Chinese babies are shaved when they are month a old.

ENGLAND is said to make enough linen yearly to envelop the earth seventeen times.

A TOBACCO pipe is seldom seen in Spain. Only cigars and cigarettes are smoked.

A GERMAN savant has discovered a method of disinfecting rivers by electricity.

It is expected that there will be fifty thousand exhibitors at the World's Fair.

ONE-FOURTH of the land surface of the globe is occupied by English-speaking people.

NEAR Nisch, Servia, a building has been discovered wholly constructed of human skulls and bones.

BOTH the Kurds and the Cossacks believe that Ararat is guarded by an unearthly being, and that no man can ascend the peak and live.

It is computed by the astronomers that the temperature of the planet Neptune reaches nine hundred degrees below zero.

"Saveenearreatoresoaralaromaronatetok." That is Eskimo for "You must get a good knife," an important thing to have in Labrador.

THERE is a Hebrew Bible in the library of the Vatican for which £20,000 has been refused. It is probably the most valuable book in the world.

AN immense oil-well in Baku, Russia, ebbs and flows with the regularity of the ocean tides. It is supposed to have some mysterious connection with the sea.

A TURKISH proverb says: If you come empty-handed they will tell you "the effendi is asleep." If you come with a present they will say, "Effendi, pray step in."

MOST people are under the impression that it is less fatiguing to go downhill than uphill, but that is because most people know very little about mountaineering. As a matter of fact, they are both about as exhausting.

AN electric locomotive is building in Switzerland, which, it is expected, will outstrip in speed any steam locomotive heretofore manufactured. It will be fitted with eight electric motors, and will possess a total of fifteen hundred horse-power.

A PORTABLE boat has been devised by Colonel Apostolon of the Russian army, which may be constructed instantly by making a framework with the lances of the Cossacks and covering with a tarred cloth. Two boats are capable of carrying thirty-six men with their baggage and arms.

THE Australian jungle fowl makes its nest in the shape of earth mounds of prodigious size, one of which measured 15 feet in perpendicular height, and having a circumference of 150 feet. These heaps are placed under shelter, and often so enveloped in foliage that, in spite of their great size, they can scarcely be discovered.

SCOTLAND is going to make a special exhibit at the Chicago Fair of a hundred stalwart Highlanders, in full national costume. They will be picked for size and strength, and not for good looks. After the fair, or before its close, if the sensation of their appearance grows weak, they will make a tour of this country.

PROFESSOR DEWAR has devised apparatus by which he can not only produce but retain long enough for observation liquid oxygen and nitrogen of the air, and these were recently exhibited at the Royal Institution in a series of experiments—optical, magnetic, thermal, and electrical—which were simply fascinating in their novelty and beauty. Both liquids are of faint blue colour, the oxygen being the darker. They have been produced by employment of intense cold and pressure combined. Without pressure air can be liquefied at a temperature of minus 215 degrees C., equal to 387 degrees of frost on the ordinary Fahrenheit scale. Up to the present time this is the greatest cold ever attained, and is more than twice as far below the freezing-point as boiling water is above it. The Professor has failed to solidify oxygen. Already every gas except hydrogen has been reduced to a liquid.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

INDIGNANT.—Pay no heed to the paragraph.

A CONSTANT READER.—We know of nothing to darken sentiment in the way you mention.

NAC.—McGarra is an Highland name, meaning son of the ford.

JUNO.—The date of Shrove Tuesday in 1867 was March 5.

F. M.—The father is not bound to attend; the mother must.

NERO.—The invention of the lute has been ascribed to the Arabs.

CORA.—The will is certain to be found at Somerset House, Strand, W.C.

BEWILDERMENT.—A letter addressed to him, in care of the manager, would reach him.

DOLLY.—The Angora goat supplies the hair which adorns ordinary dolls.

CURIOSITY.—July 4, 1811, was a Thursday, and January 15, 1805, a Tuesday.

PUZZLED.—The name "Lord" was given to the gentleman at baptism, it is not a title.

FEATHERWEIGHT.—Food containing much starch and sugar may in time aid in increasing one's weight.

T. B. H.—The property of a wife dying intestate belongs to her husband.

ECONOMY.—It would cost more to renovate the mackintosh than to purchase a new one.

LEAM.—We know of nothing for the purpose, except that you should take care to keep in good health.

BOMPRIN.—If troubled with creaking shoes rub the sides of the soles with a little sweet oil.

MAYPOLE.—Some people are spare by nature, and nothing can be taken which can alter their condition.

M. R.—A relieved murderer must remain twenty years in prison, that is the rule now.

REFUS.—The only capital crimes are murder, treason, and treason-felony.

POVERTY.—A stepson is not liable to contribute to the support of his stepmother in the workhouse.

BOB.—A farmer must have a gun license for killing hares.

G. T.—Lord Cardigan was not killed at the Crimea, but died quite recently at an advanced age.

INGRATE.—Disputes between an apprentice and his master may be settled by summons before a magistrate.

BAD MANNERS.—At any repeat never urge your guests to eat or drink more than they seem inclined to; and do not overload their plates.

A MODEL HOUSEKEEPER.—The only thing safe to use for cleaning the pictures is stale bread crumbs. Any chemical would remove the surface as well as the dirt.

ECCENTRICITY.—Many people are cremated in England; there are two crematories—one at Woking, Surrey, the other at Manchester.

EVANGELINE.—Lava is the melted matter which flows from a volcano. The word is Italian from the Latin *lavare*, to wash.

EXPERIMENT.—The tenant's consent is necessary before you can affix a telephone wire to the premises. The landlord's consent is not sufficient.

ANXIOUS ONE.—Your writing is of the style required by the Civil Service examiners, but it is not good enough to pass them. You want more practice and freedom.

JACK SPRAY.—If you have gone as far as Mr. Pitman's books will take you, your best plan is to obtain as much practice as possible, so as to increase your speed.

A. E. P.—An executor cannot appoint either a co-executor or a successor. If another is wanted, application must be made to the Court.

HORRIFIED.—The crinoline first made its appearance in Paris in the early days of the Second Empire, when the Empress Eugenie was the arbiter of fashion.

INCREDULITY.—Yes; the island possesses a breed of cats without tails, or at most they are pronounced "merely rudimental substitutes for them."

REMOVER.—The mother can register the child in her own name only, not in the father's except he is present to give consent to that arrangement.

IGNORAMUS.—"Kismet" is an anglicized form of the Turkish word "*qismet*" and the Persian "*qismet*," meaning "fate" or "lot in life."

A LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—Fresh milk, applied every week with a soft cloth to boots and shoes, has a freshening and preservative effect upon the leather.

ROVER.—A certain knowledge of seamanship is necessary, or an aptitude in that direction. Also a training, such as a butler or waiter in a hotel has had, is requisite.

SWEET VALENTINE.—St. Valentine was a bishop who suffered martyrdom A.D. 270. There is an adage that runs: "On this day the birds began to pair"; and it is no doubt owing to the custom of young people dating their engagements from this day that it has come to be observed as it is.

ONE IN NEED OF HELP.—Your best plan would be to apply to the Registrar of Deaths, Somerset House, Strand, W.C., if you fail to find the date from the registrar of your own parish.

A WORLDLY GIRL.—At a Quaker wedding no clergyman officiates. The principals exchange vows in the presence of friends, a certificate is signed, and the ceremony is over.

BEATRIX.—Penzance is the most westerly town of England. It is a seaport, and is surrounded by rocky embayments. It is nine miles east-north-east of Land's End.

IMPATIENT.—If you engaged for a year you cannot leave your employer until the year is up. At the expiration of that period you can leave with a month's notice, if that notice is usual in your occupation.

ONE IN DESPAIR.—If the woman drinks to an extent which unfits her for paying needed attention to her children, she ought not to have any of them; it is cruel to leave them in her hands.

M. A.—Soak the feet in hot salt water for ten minutes every night, and after drying dust them over with some finely-powdered oxide of zinc. Change your socks every day, and wear stout boots.

ARMY.—We can only advise you to write to the Secretary, National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London, S.W., stating your case fully. The fact of your having been in the army should help you, but we are afraid vacancies seldom occur.

HEARKENING FOR HIS STEP.

SHE hearkens for his step

In the hush of her lonely room.

Yet starts with dread at each echoing tread

That sounds from the outer gloom—

As she rocks the cradle near

With a tremulous hand and slow.

"Ah, Heaven!" she sighs: "But the night is drear

With the thoughts of long ago."

She thinks of the rosy time

In the not so long ago

When she hearkened for the same swift tread

With a heart like a summer dawn.

How it spurned the pebble and shell—

How it gambolled as it drew near!

How her heart stood still as its music fell

On her bowed and listening ear!

Stood still, but not as now

With doubt and misgiving— Hark!

There it comes at last, now slow, now fast,

And stumbling along the dark.

She seizes the sleeping child,

And gathers it to her breast—

No; he is only merry, not bad and wild,

And his greeting's a tipsy jest.

But oh! when her tear-wet cheek

On her pillow at last is laid,

How crumble and fall each shining wall

Of the castles in air she made!

Who will blame if she sometimes pray

That her heart shall catch the sound

Of an echoing step beyond the day,

Where all is repose profound?

N. D. U.

A LOVER OF ANTIQUITIES.—The Tower of David is supposed to be a massive tower of the citadel of Jerusalem. A writer describes it as the oldest portion of the citadel, rising in a solid mass to the height of 29 ft.; and unassailable by the battering-ram.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—What you have to say to the pawnbroker is that you will give him half the sum he advanced in pledge upon the watch, not more, and if he refuses to take that you will sue the police custodian for it, and get it without giving the broker anything at all; the man knows that is the law quite well.

A RUINED LIFE.—It is much better that you should have a written agreement, because that makes the terms on which you separate plain and indisputable at all times; the moment your wife separates from you anyone who gives her credit does so at his own risk, not at yours.

VICTIM.—There is really no rule confining the selection of bestman to immediate relatives of the bridegroom; it is generally found expedient to have a stranger; but if a brother is to be selected it ought to be one younger rather than older than the bridegroom himself.

T. J. D.—So far as your facts show you are in the same position as the rest of the tenants, so far as the purchase of your tenement goes. But the fact that your previous landlord allowed you the use of the adjoining garden does not give you any title to call that plot your own.

G. F.—The only circumstances under which an apprentice engineer can insist upon lines of servitude from his employers are where he is able to show that he is being kept out of employment for want of them, and has then grounds of action for damages against his late employers for withholding the lines.

CHICK.—To restore piano-keys to their original colour requires very careful handling. Dilute one ounce of nitric acid in ten ounces of soft water. Apply this liquid to the ivory with a brush, taking care that none of it goes on the wood to which the ivory is veneered nor into the joints. Wash off the liquid carefully with a piece of flannel dipped in clean water.

FRANK.—An agreement between master and servant must be equitable to be binding; if your employer therefore reserves power to himself to discharge you with a month's notice, he must let you go on getting a month's notice from you; the agreement should be stamped, but it may be proved without production of any document.

DISTRACTED ONE.—The father's duty is supposed to be fulfilled by the payment of the aliment, but while that is the rule there may be, of course, an exception to it in your case, if you have had to pay an extra sum for medical attendance on the child; in the meantime send the father the bill and intimate that he will be sued for it if he does not settle it.

ABEL.—There is no appointment to the position of prison warder; that must be obtained through time, urgency, or interest. Men are appointed as assistant warders, stokers, stewards, porters, foremen of works, gasmen, farm bailiffs, labourers, night watchmen, guards, &c. The first four rules of arithmetic, reading, and writing only are necessary for assistant warder.

DISTRESS.—None of the furniture of the wife in the house will be safe from the husband's creditors beyond her own clothes and trinkets, and if the money in bank is truly the husband's they can take it; the wife's business and earnings, if the husband has no part in it, will be safe, and so will the stock if she paid for it or got it from some one else than her husband.

BOUNCING B.—Agates (glass marbles) are made mostly at Oberstein in Germany, out of the stone called agate. The workmen chip the pieces of agate nearly round with hammers, and then grind them round and smooth on grindstones. Marbles called by boys "chinas," or "alloys," are made out of china and white marble. Real china ones are made of porcelain clay, and baked like chinaware or other pottery.

NORTH COUNTRY.—If you were born after 1854 it is certain that your birth would be registered; all that is now necessary in order to ascertain your correct age is to discover the parish in which you were born, and thereafter to write to the Registrar House, Edinburgh, giving the name of the parish with approximate date of birth; send at the same time 4s. 7d., and request an extract certificate of your birth.

WANDERER.—The origin of the phrase "where the shoe pinches" is given in Plutarch's "Life of Lucius Emilius Paulus," a Roman general. One of his countrymen, who had been divorced from his wife, was greatly blamed by his friends for his conduct. They asked, "Was she not chaste? Was she not fair?" He replied, holding out his shoe: "Is it not new and well made? Yet none of you can tell where it pinches me."

HENDERSON.—The name Henderson is of Scottish origin—derived from Henry—son of Henry—the Mac-Henry, or when the clan migrated to the North of Ireland known as the O'Henry—but always Celtic Scottish, whether with the Scottish prefix Mac, or the Irish O. Henderson is a corruption of the original name, easily fallen into when you consider how slipshod is the Scottish dialect. The clan was a powerful one, and, as O'Henry, is noted in "The Four Masters."

A. P. W.—There is no convenient form of receipt you could give your wife that would protect her in case of your bankruptcy; as a matter of fact she would rank on your estate, but only after all the other creditors had been satisfied; if you have presently a good house of furniture you might formally assign that to her in security of the money she is lending you, and she would have it to fall back upon, but otherwise the case is as we have stated it.

MUFF.—The way to obtain provisional protection for your invention is to get a form of application for patent through a money-order office for 2s.; fill it up as required, add specification of the invention either provisional or complete, and forward all to the Patent Office, 25, Southampton Buildings, London; when you are informed that the specification has been accepted your invention is provisionally protected for nine months without further payment.

A COUNTRY BOY.—Take a six months' engagement on a farm at home, even if it gives you no more than food, shelter, and enough to cover passage money at the end of the term, then you can go out, and with your special training ought to go right ahead to success; meantime get, gratis, at Canadian Government Office, 40, St. Enoch-square, copy of "Canadian Handbook," to be digested at leisure. But if you have not courage to face a farm job here, rest assured you would not have it in Canada either.

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